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Citation style: Zasempa Marek. (2008). The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood: painting versus poetry. Praca doktorska. Katowice : Uniwersytet Śląski

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Ministerstwo Nauki
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**THE PRE-RAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD:
PAINTING VERSUS POETRY**

SUPERVISOR:

prof. dr hab. Wojciech Kalaga

Completed in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the
degree of PhD.

UNIVERSITY OF SILESIA

KATOWICE 2008

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BRACTWO PRERAFaelICKIE
– MALARSTWO A POEZJA

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UNIwersYTET ŚLĄSKI

KATOWICE 2008

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INTRODUCTION

The present study is an analysis of the relationships between painting and poetry in the work of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Relying on the long-researched *ut pictura poesis* tradition, the argument demonstrates that parallelism between the arts still remains open to discussion as an issue that is not fully established theoretically. Modern interdisciplinary theories are used in this study to facilitate exploration of the painting-poetry correlation in a way that leads, as I believe, to new findings. These findings are made possible by an approach to the correspondence of the arts that treats poetry and painting as codification systems; such a line of study emphasises the process of generating and functioning of the resulting structures in both arts. Throughout the argument, poetry and painting are analysed from the perspective of their representational value. Therefore, the study does not merely identify visual features of verbal language or linguistic features of visuality. It is not the aim of the present research to pursue the recurrence and imitation of themes in the two arts, but to investigate the intellectual operations that allow artists to achieve similar or identical goals by means of dissimilar tools, methods and material. Concurrently, the study shows how each of these two forms of artistic expression translates into the other medium, how they share each other's features, and how each of those forms can imitate the other.

* * *

The general method of this thesis is the application of similar intellectual tools to a comparative study of two seemingly dissimilar arts. This requires a series of theoretical assumptions of which the most important is the treatment of poetry and painting as "secondary modelling systems."¹ The distinction between primary and secondary modelling systems, which was introduced by Jurij Lotman in the 1960s, has been recently proposed by, for instance, Seweryna Wyślouch, as a method which leads to a valid comparative study of painting and poetry.² The primary systems, i.e.

¹ "The term 'secondary modelling systems' should be understood in the following way: the term is used in the descriptions of systems which are founded on language, but they develop a supplementary structure of a specific type. In this way, 'secondary modelling systems' unavoidably embrace whole sets of language relations and supplement them with more complex constructional relations of a different order." [own translation] (Yurij Lotman, *Trudy po znakovym sistemam* [Studies in sign systems], vol. II, *Transactions of Tartu University*, no. 181, 1965, p. 6.); Yurij Lotman, "The Problem of Meaning in Secondary Modelling Systems," *New Literary History*, vol. 8 (1977), pp. 22-37.

² Seweryna Wyślouch, *Literatura i semiotyka* [Literature and semiotics] (Warszawa: PWN, 2001), pp. 21-36. Seweryna Wyślouch, "Ut pictura poesis – stara formuła i nowe problemy," in: *Ut pictura poesis*, eds. M. Skwara, S. Wyślouch (Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz/terytoria, 2006), p. 17.

the verbal (ethnic) language code and the visual code, are composed of sets of basic elements (“dictionaries”³) that can be syntagmatically and paradigmatically arranged – through the sets of rules complementing the system – into larger entities, images (signs).⁴ Consequently, the signs weave texts – separately visual and verbal – but they are also able to create intertexts of indistinguishable verbalism and visuality of their components. At this point a major reservation has to be made. One of the basic differences between the codes relates to the dissimilar character of those rules: while the rules of the verbal code are highly rigorous, the visual code allows for greater arbitrariness and non-standardisation. What is crucial is the impossibility of defining a common set of norms applying to all painterly creations (except for a few, e.g. perspective, canons common to a painter’s work, school, epoch or artistic tradition.) At the same time, the question of the articulation of the two systems arises; as Umberto Eco claims, the notion of double articulation needs further enquiry as there are codes which do not necessarily require the second level of articulation.⁵

An implication that follows from the above suppositions is that of the divisibility of visual images. Whereas the elements of the verbal code are naturally isolatable (in the terms of both linguistic and literary analysis), the treatment of the visual code as potentially divisible into smaller meaningful units remains a more contentious issue. However, the tradition of considering visual representation as divisible dates back to the fifteenth-century theories of Leon Battista Alberti, and has recently been taken up, with various emphases, by Rudolph Arnheim, Ernst Gombrich, Meyer Schapiro, W. J. T. Mitchell, Nelson Goodman and Umberto Eco. Such a view of visual images makes it easier to consider them as having a textual nature, and indeed, according to the semiotic approach, pictorial representation can be treated as an ordered system of signs comparable to that connected with verbal representation. Both visual and verbal systems are analysed in this dissertation in terms of the mechanisms of their functioning and their mutual penetration in the form

³ Umberto Eco, *Nieobecna struktura* [The absent structure] (Wydawnictwo KR: Warszawa, 1996), p. 58.

⁴ However, 20th century developments in biosemiotics question the primary nature of ethnic languages (e.g. Thomas Sebeok, “In what sense is language a ‘primary modeling system?’” in: *A Sign Is Just a Sign*, Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 1991), pp. 49–58.) which are treated as secondary, built on top of the human sensory system. Nevertheless, this dissertation treats both codes – the verbal and the visual – as roughly equivalent (placed on the same level of system’s development), regardless of their categorization.

⁵ Umberto Eco, “Mit podwójnego podziału,” in: *Nieobecna struktura* (Wydawnictwo KR: Warszawa, 1996), pp. 145–148.

of – depending on the term applied by a given theoretician – interference (Caws⁶), oscillation (Nancy⁷) or intertextual dissemination (Dziadek⁸).

The dissertation does not assume, however, that visual and verbal expression are identical. Rather, they are comparable in structural, semantic and semiotic function. A parallel aim of my research is to show the similarities fusing these two methods of representation and, simultaneously, to reveal the differences between them; the latter has recently been a more valid research target.⁹ The basic differences are unquestionable: in Foucault's words, "the relation of language to painting is an infinite relation"; thus, it is not the aim of this research to "[reduce] one to the other's terms":

But the relation of language to painting is an infinite relation. It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other's terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendour is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax.¹⁰

The methodology of my research relies on the treatment of painterly and poetic images as comparable units of expression, but this is not to claim that *any* image and *any* (verbal) text are always comparable. Such a misleading view of the painting – poetry relationship often provides an easy target for the critics of these arts' sisterhood. Nelson Goodman, for instance, quite rightly claims that "pictures" have an analog nature: they are syntactically and semantically continuous and lack differentiation and articulation, unlike words and texts that are composed of letters, each of which can be easily singled out and identified. In Goodman's words, pictures are "dense" whereas words are "differentiated."¹¹ Mitchell, discussing that part of Goodman's theory, uses the example of Mona Lisa's nose: "A particular spot of

⁶ Mary Ann Caws, *The Art of Interference: Stressed Reading in Verbal and Visual Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

⁸ oryg. "intertekstualne rozsiewanie," Adam Dziadek, *Obrazy i wiersze* [Images and poems] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2004).

⁹ Seweryna Wysłouch concludes her paper presented during the 2003 symposium "Intersemiotyczność. Literatura wobec innych sztuk (i odwrotnie)" at the Jagiellonian University with the following constatation: "A zatem dzieło literackie jest przekładalne na inny system znaków, na obraz, scenę czy ekran. [...] Nie musimy więc szukać pokrewieństwa sztuk, bo jest nam dane. Szukać należy różnic. One świadczą o talencie twórcy i manifestują specyfikę poszczególnych dyscyplin." ("Literatura i obraz. Tereny strukturalnej wspólnoty sztuk," in: *Intersemiotyczność. Literatura wobec innych sztuk (i odwrotnie)*. *Studia* [Intersemioticity. Literature versus other arts], eds. S. Balbus, A. Hejmej, J. Niedźwiedz (Kraków: Universitas, 2004), p. 27.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, "Las Meninas" in: *The Order of Things* (Pantheon Books: New York, 1971), p. 9.

¹¹ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), pp. 152-154, 226.

paint might be read as the highlight on Mona Lisa's nose, but that spot achieves its significance in the specific system of pictorial relations to which it belongs, not as a uniquely differentiated character that might be transferred to some other canvas."¹² Mitchell contrasts that quality of painting with the system of the alphabet in which, obviously, each letter serves as a unique unit, easily distinguishable and, regardless of context, remaining the same letter. Also, it is not important *how* this letter is written, since its physical form does not change its meaning.

There is no denying that the above assertions are true with regard to verbal language and visual images, but Goodman's application of those basic differences to poetry and painting, as secondary modelling systems, becomes an overstatement:

Nonlinguistic systems differ from languages, depiction from description, the representational form from the verbal, painting from poems, primarily through lack of differentiation – indeed through density (and consequent total absence of articulation) – of the symbol system.¹³

To exploit Mitchell's example, let us compare the fragment of da Vinci's painting which shows Mona Lisa's nose with its verbal equivalent "the highlight on Mona Lisa's nose" and treat it as a fossilised verbal image. Both images appear in a given context which is immediately clear, and both are plainly differentiated and unique. To put it trivially, there's only one Mona Lisa and only one Mona Lisa's nose. In the micro-context of the painting, the highlight can be easily separated visually; in the linguistic context, however, the verbal image retains its signification even if used in a completely *different* context, as in the following sentence: "The highlight on Marilyn Monroe's face in this photograph resembles the 'the highlight on Mona Lisa's nose'." As it turns out, the verbal image is as "dense" as the visual one. This effect is conditioned by a handling of such verbal images that dispenses with the necessity to strip the verbal down to its basic elements – but understood as *linguistic* rudiments: words (which are ambiguous when standing alone), letters, phonemes, etc. Still, even individual words can be treated as such distinct images: the representation of an apple in Rossetti's canvas *Venus Verticordia* corresponds to the word "apple" used in his poem accompanying the painting. As was mentioned earlier, the present study follows an approach that takes into account meaningful units of poetry and painting as systems of representation *built on* linguistic and visual fundamentals.

¹² W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 67.

¹³ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, p. 226.

* * *

In summary, what I believe and hope to be the originality of this study is the following: first, apart from analysing the themes expressed in both arts, it considers the intellectual operations and methods used to achieve similar effects in different artistic domains. Secondly, the argument assumes that both literary *and* painterly works are divisible into more rudimentary images, and it comparatively analyses the structural and functional roles of these images. Moreover, the argument assumes that the visual arts have a textual character comparable to that of the verbal arts, in order to demonstrate these texts' trans- and intersemiotic, as well as trans- and intermedial, qualities.¹⁴

As was stated earlier, my primary focus in this dissertation will be the study of specific examples of painting-poetry relationships in the work of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. This study can be provisionally divided into four conceptual parts. The first concerns a specific case in the theory of the correspondence between the arts, namely, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "double works of art," pairings of paintings and poems composed as thematic unities. In Chapter 2, this phenomenon is discussed from the perspective of its perception by the reader/viewer as such a unity; however, a division of the doubles is introduced in order to reveal certain variations affecting the strength of the bonds between the poetic and the painterly components of each pair.

The second conceptual part of the study involves poetry created under the influence of painterly representations, and its opposite, painting, inspired by poetic accounts. These notions are presented separately in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively. The discussion in Chapter 3 of verbal transformations of pictorial sources centers on selected examples of Rossetti's *Sonnets for Pictures*, while the visual manifestations of literary sources discussed in Chapter 4 include instances of D.G. Rossetti's, William H. Hunt's and John E. Millais's painting. Chapter 3 focuses on poetry's ability to convey or to alter the temporal structures incorporated in paintings by, for example, Andrea Mantegna, Sandro Boticelli and Hans Memling. In addition, both poems and paintings are analysed from the perspective of the idea of spectatorship.

¹⁴ Ewa Szczęsna, "Wprowadzenie do poetyki intersemiotycznej," in: *Intersemiotyczność. Literatura wobec innych sztuk (i odwrotnie)*. *Studia*, eds. S. Balbus, A. Hejmej, J. Niedźwiedz (Kraków: Universitas, 2004), pp. 29-38.

The act of beholding and the “chronology” of the depicted scenes become main issues accounting for the complex character of the process of transformation from the visual to the verbal.

The third, most extensive, section of the thesis is related to the question of the poetic qualities of painting and, again reversing the situation, the painterly features of poetry. An important reservation in this case is the fact that the examples gathered in this part of the study – Pre-Raphaelite poems and paintings – do not form any sanctioned couplings. In other words, the paintings discussed in Chapter 5 are not formally connected with any literary sources, and the poems referred to in Chapter 6 do not have any known painterly counterparts. Such a segregation of the works follows the aim of this section which is to demonstrate the intertextual mingling of the two forms of artistic expression. The objective is attained by means of an exposition of typical features of one mode of expression as seen in the other; this involves analyses of temporality, spatiality, narration, the verbal “anchorage” of titles and the manifestations of stylistic devices in Pre-Raphaelite painting. Accordingly, spatiality (as a feature traditionally denied to poetry), spectatorship and detailed imagery are presented as qualities that generate the pictoriality of Pre-Raphaelite poetry.

* * *

The main body of the study is preceded by a general presentation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood’s work as the research object. The grouping of poets and painters remains unique in the history of art and literature owing to their ability to juxtapose, combine or merge two forms of art. This distinctive competence of the Pre-Raphaelites allows to formulate and develop the theses of the present study, the theses which offer a novel look at the Brotherhood’s work. Primarily, however, the introduction and the exploration of the abovementioned assumptions becomes an attempt at a reconsideration of the relationships between the arts.

Chapter 1: THE PRE-RAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD: ORIGINS, PHASES AND DOCTRINES

I. THE GENESIS

“Pre-Raphaelitism” is a confusing term which refers to both art and literature in 19th century England. The reason for the confusion is a claim, found in many critical accounts, that there were essentially two different movements of this name, appearing in succession. There have been at least a few attempts at classifying the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as a circle of friends, artists, poets and theoreticians. Critics have divided the achievements of this short-lived movement into periods and formal stages of the members’ artistic lives. Founded in 1849, the original Brotherhood included William Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais, William Michael Rossetti, James Collinson, Thomas Woolner, and F. G. Stephens. In addition to the formal members of the PRB, other contemporary personalities formed the so-called “Pre-Raphaelite circle,” which included the painters Ford Madox Brown and Charles Collins, the poet Christina Rossetti, the artist and social critic John Ruskin, the painter-poet William Bell Scott, and the sculptor-poet John Lucas Tupper. In the later stages of the movement’s existence, artists like J. W. Inchbold, Edward Burne-Jones, and William Morris joined the circle and, in the case of a few, greatly shaped the group’s artistic life. The most prominent painter-poets of the group were D.G. Rossetti and William Morris, but there were at least a few non-painting poets of the epoch who adhered to the principles of Pre-Raphaelitism, among them Christina Rossetti, George Meredith and Algernon Charles Swinburne.

The most general accounts of the movement’s development divide the history of the Brethren into the first generation – composed of the original members – and the second phase, beginning when Burne-Jones and Morris joined. Indeed, Pre-Raphaelitism, at least in painting, encompassed two stages: first, the “hard-edge symbolic naturalism”¹ that began in 1849, and the second incarnation that developed in the later 1850s, mainly under the direction of D.G. Rossetti and his follower Edward Burne-Jones; this particular period is characterised by an emphasis on themes of eroticised medievalism and on painterly techniques that produced moody

¹ George P. Landow, “Pre-Raphaelitism in Poetry,” *The Victorian Web*, ed. George P. Landow, March 2004, <<http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/prb/4.html>>.

atmosphere.² The second stage sees also a change in topics: more social, urban and historical themes appear, as in Brown's *The Last of England* and *Work* or in Rossetti's *Found*; moreover, a compositional and structural shift emerges at this point in the artists' turning away from detail and narration. According to a distinguished Victorian researcher, George Landow, only this second-stage, or Aesthetic, Pre-Raphaelitism has relevance to poetry and exerts influence on literature, "[...] although the combination of realistic style with elaborate symbolism that distinguishes the early movement appears in a few poems, particularly in those by the Rossettis."³

The Pre-Raphaelite organ, a short-lived periodical called *The Germ*, which survived for only four issues, contained significant literary works created by the members of the Brotherhood. D. G. Rossetti contributed a tale called *Hand and Soul* and seven important poems including "My Sister's Sleep" and "The Blessed Damozel"; Christina Rossetti, then eighteen, contributed seven more, including "Dream Land" and "Repining." The ephemeral existence of *The Germ* contributed to the lack of any formal statement concerning Pre-Raphaelite artistic ideals; certain minor declarations appeared in the individual members' memoirs, but no recognized programme of the Pre-Raphaelites' aims was recorded. Rossetti's already-mentioned short story *Hand and Soul* provided, however, a certain manifesto for the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The text is the tale of a young painter deprived of creative powers, who is urged by his soul enclosed in the body of a beautiful woman to paint *her*, that is, to depict an incarnation of his own soul. Thus, Rossetti puts emphasis on the artist's only duty: to believe and stay faithful "to his own emotions and imagination and then express them."⁴

Landow summarises the Pre-Raphaelite ideals, suggesting that "they hoped to create an art suitable for the modern age," obeying the following principles:

1. Testing and defying all conventions of art; for example, if the Royal Academy schools taught art students to compose paintings with (a) pyramidal groupings of figures, (b) one major source of light at one side matched by a lesser one on the opposite, and (c) an emphasis on rich shadow and tone at the expense of color, the PRB with brilliant perversity painted bright-colored, evenly lit pictures that appeared almost flat.

² George P. Landow, "Pre-Raphaelites: An Introduction."

³ George P. Landow, "Pre-Raphaelites: An Introduction."

⁴ George P. Landow, "Aesthetic Pre-Raphaelitism," *The Victorian Web*, ed. George P. Landow, March 2004, <<http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/landow/victorian/painting/prb/3.html>>.

2. The PRB also emphasized precise, almost photographic representation of even humble objects, particularly those in the immediate foreground (which were traditionally left blurred or in shade) – thus violating conventional views of both proper style and subject.
3. Following Ruskin, they attempted to transform the resultant hardedge realism (created by 1 and 2) by combining it with typological symbolism. At their most successful, the PRB produced a magic or symbolic realism, often using devices found in the poetry of Tennyson and Browning.
4. Believing that the arts were closely allied, the PRB encouraged artists and writers to practice each other's art, though only D.G. Rossetti did so with particular success.
5. Looking for new subjects, they drew upon Shakespeare, Keats, and Tennyson.⁵

The aims of the movement include the desire to revive the pre-fifteenth-century ideals of painting. In this endeavour, Raphael's name was used as a symbolic border-point in the history of modern art; as Graham Hough stresses, the Pre-Raphaelites, knowing nothing about Raphael, did not really scorn him – it was rather a reaction against “Raphaelitism,” the work of Raphael's imitators, which was to be scorned. Hence, Hunt makes a clear distinction between “pre-raphaelism” and “pre-raphaelitism.”⁶ Going beyond the mark of Raphael fulfilled the need for simplicity, “naturalness”, primitivism and archaism; still, the Pre-Raphaelites were not consistent in this desire, using also post-Raphaelite sources, including, to name a few, Hogarth's, Flaxman's, Giorgione's and Titian's works.

The second direction of the revolutionary drift comes from the Pre-Raphaelite reaction against Academism. The Pre-Raphaelites rejected all the principles that Sir Joshua Reynolds cherished; as mentioned in Landow's assessment, pyramidal, hierarchical groupings of figures were replaced by a heterogeneous, unrestricted amalgamation of individuals; even lighting covered the whole surface of a painting – sometimes even making it over-lit – instead of being suppressed and fractional. Additionally, Pre-Raphaelite paintings offer the viewer an explosion of colours which are bold and divergent. Finally, in many Pre-Raphaelite paintings, the artists abandoned traditional perspective, making the pictures almost flat (as in the case of Millais's *Isabella*).

These two revolutionary elements – fascination with pre-Renaissance art and anti-Academism – make Pre-Raphaelitism the most innovative and avant-garde artistic movement of the 19th century, whose ideals foreshadow the 20th century

⁵ George P. Landow, “Pre-Raphaelites: An Introduction.”

⁶ William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1905), pp. 135-137.

Modernist and Imagist creeds. Anthony Harrison, in his study of Christina Rossetti, summarises the major Pre-Raphaelite doctrines in the following way:

...the Pre-Raphaelites predictably etherealized sensation, displacing it from logical contexts and all normally expected physical relations with objects in the external world. With the Pre-Raphaelites the sensory and even the sensual become idealized, image becomes symbol, and physical experience is superseded by mental states as we are thrust deeply into the self-contained emotional worlds of their varied personae. Very seldom do we have even the implied auditor of Browning's dramatic monologues to give us our bearings, to situate a speaker's perceptions in the phenomenal world.⁷

The sensuality, obscurity and almost illogical imagery of Pre-Raphaelite poetry contributes to the overall uniqueness and novelty of this particular branch of Victorian literature.

II. CONTEMPORARY RECEPTION AND CRITICISM

From the beginning, the Brotherhood was constantly attacked for the "outrageous" character of their pictorial work. The major points of criticism concerned the anti-Academic techniques, structure, composition and colour, as well as the depictions of human body, because "truthfulness to nature" in the Pre-Raphaelite doctrine entailed also sincere treatment of carnality. Critics were appalled by the combinations of the plebeian and the saintly and by the sensuality of both poetry and painting. Charles Dickens, in his legendary comment on Millais's *Carpenter's Shop*, focuses on the ugliness of the Virgin Mother, comparing her representation to "a monster in the vilest cabaret in France or the lowest gin-shop in England."⁸ The opinion is quite symptomatic: according to many Victorians, holiness could not bear any traces of the mundane and the hideous. Another famous piece of contemporary criticism came from Robert Buchanan, who named the brethren "the Fleshly School of poetry," attacking them for their overuse of sensual images, emphasis on poetic "expression" instead of poetic "thought," and "inference that body is greater than soul."⁹ Generally, what Buchanan could not stand was "form

⁷ Anthony H. Harrison, "Pre-Raphaelite Love" in *Christina Rossetti in Context, The Victorian Web*, ed. George P. Landow, March 2004,

<<http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/landow/victorian/authors/crossetti/harrison2/4.2.html#prpoetry>>.

⁸ Stephen Spender, "The Pre-Raphaelite Literary Painters," in: *Pre-Raphaelitism: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. James Sambrook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 122.

⁹ Robert Buchanan, "The Fleshly School of Poetry," *Contemporary Review*, XXVIII, (1871), quoted in: *Pre-Raphaelitism: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. James Sambrook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 186.

for its own sake” diminishing “meaningful content.”¹⁰ The short-lived controversy instigated by this critic only proved that the Brotherhood had established a novel approach to poetry and painting which was at war with Victorian prudishness and fossilised approaches to art.

The lack of supporters at the beginning of the movement’s existence was recompensed in its later stages, for when backing appeared, it came from the greatest artistic masterminds of the epoch – John Ruskin and Walter Pater. It is natural to mention Ruskin here, as most Pre-Raphaelite ideas either originated from or liaised with Ruskin’s; his essay “Pre-Raphaelitism” correlates Pre-Raphaelitism and Turner on the grounds of the accomplishment of similar aims in both methods of painting: “the fusion of different kinds of reality, distinct levels of perception, separate modes of artistic style within the same picture.”¹¹ What Ruskin valued most in Pre-Raphaelitism was the immense artistic diversity of the school. The same quality is emphasised in Pater’s appreciations of the Brotherhood; for instance, he points to Rossetti’s unique combinations of the natural with the supernatural, attempts at materialising the immaterial and his sincerity.¹² Generally, it was the innovative character of the movement’s work that pleased both Pater and Ruskin; the two critics treated the Pre-Raphaelites as their soldiers in the war against the old, academic, conventional art.

III. INFLUENCES

The Pre-Raphaelites, especially W.H. Hunt, always attempted to bridge realism and symbolism, in which endeavour they mirrored John Ruskin or, more specifically, the second volume of *Modern Painters*, where in a passage concerning typological symbolism in Tintoretto’s *Annunciation*, Ruskin observes how, “startled by the rush of angel wings,”...

... the Virgin sits [...] houseless, under the shelter of a palace vestibule ruined and abandoned, with the noise of the axe and the hammer in her ears, and the tumult of a city round about her desolation. The spectator turns away at first, revolted, from the central object of the picture forced painfully and coarsely forward, a mass of shattered brickwork, with the plaster mildewed away from it, and the mortar mouldering from its seams; and if he looks again, either at this or at the carpenter’s tools beneath it, will perhaps see [...] nothing more than such a study of scene as Tintoret could but too easily obtain among the ruins of his

¹⁰ Buchannan, “The Fleshly School of Poetry,” p. 187.

¹¹ Richard L. Stein, *The Ritual of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 124.

¹² Stein, *The Ritual of Interpretation*, p. 125.

own Venice, chosen to give a coarse explanation of the calling and the condition of the husband of Mary.¹³

Ruskin gives emphasis to the fact that this realistic and detailed depiction of a desolate scene, on first impression, invades the viewer's reception, especially through the images of the picturesque mildewed plaster, rough brickwork and the crumbling mortar. "But there is more meant than this," Ruskin continues, because if the spectator studies the composition of the picture,

[...] he will find the whole symmetry of it depending on a narrow line of light, the edge of a carpenter's square, which connects these unused tools with an object at the top of the brickwork, a white stone, four square, the corner-stone of the old edifice, the base of its supporting column. This, I think, sufficiently explains the typical [typological] character of the whole. The ruined house is the Jewish dispensation; that obscurely arising in the dawning of the sky is the Christian; but the corner-stone of the old building remains, though the builders' tools lie idle beside it, and the stone which the builders refused is become the Headstone of the Corner.¹⁴

Ruskin's ideas solved many of the problems the Pre-Raphaelites were troubled with. As Landow explains in an analysis of the critic's influence on the Brotherhood:

[...] typological symbolism allowed The Pre-Raphaelites to reconcile their love of detailed realism with the need to make painting depict the unseen truths of the spirit [...]

The symbolism, first of all, strikes the informed spectator as a natural language inherent in the visual details themselves and not as something laid upon the objects in some artificial manner. Indeed, as Ruskin pointed out, the first clue to the meaning of *The Annunciation* comes from its composition, which naturally and necessarily guides the eye to those details whose comprehension releases one into a world of religious vision. The second aspect of this kind of symbolism is that it spiritualizes the most brutal fact, allowing the painter to concentrate simultaneously upon painterly skills and his deeper message.¹⁵

Hunt quite openly expressed his fascination with Ruskin's views; in a letter, he admits that he had recently "had great delight in skimming over a certain book, *Modern Painters*, by a writer calling himself an Oxford Graduate; it was lent to me only for a few hours, but, by Jove! passages in it made my heart thrill. He feels the

¹³ quoted in: George P. Landow, "Typology in the Visual Arts," *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows; Biblical Typology in Victorian Literature, Art, and Thought* (www version) *The Victorian Web*, ed. George P. Landow, March 2004, <http://www.victorianweb.org/religion/type/ch4a.html>>.

¹⁴ George P. Landow, "Word-Painting As Interpretation in Ruskin's Art Criticism," *The Victorian Web*, March 2004, <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/ruskin/finearts/criticism10.html>>.

¹⁵ George P. Landow, "The Influence of John Ruskin," *Replete with Meaning: William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, *The Victorian Web*, ed. George P. Landow, March 2004, <<http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/whh/replete/ruskin.html>>.

power and responsibility of art more than any author I have ever read.”¹⁶ Later on, he adds that Ruskin’s descriptions of Venetian painting make you “see them with your inner sight, and you feel that the men who did them had been appointed by God, like old prophets, to bear a sacred message.”¹⁷ This fascination resulted in Hunt’s setting forth of his own theories of art that, as he believed, resembled Tintoretto’s ideals:

When language was not transcendental enough to complete the meaning of a revelation, symbols were relied upon for heavenly teaching, and familiar images, chosen from the known, were made to mirror the unknown spiritual truth. The forerunners and contemporaries of Tintoretto had consecrated the custom, to which he gave a larger value and more original meaning. How far such symbolism is warranted depends upon its unobtrusiveness and its restriction within limits not destroying natural beauty. There is no more reason why the features belonging to a picture should be distorted for the purpose of such imaginative suggestion than that the poet’s metaphors should spoil his words for ordinary uses of man. Tintoretto’s meaning was expressed with no arbitrary or unnatural disturbance of the truth.¹⁸

Hunt’s essay *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* clearly verifies the importance of Ruskin’s criticism for Hunt himself as well as for the other members of the Brotherhood. Furthermore, it was Hunt who converted the others to Ruskinism; the painter admits it in a letter to Ruskin himself:

All that the Preraphaelite Brotherhood had of Ruskinism came from this reading of mine. Rossetti was too absorbed with Dante and with French literature and still more, of course, English Romantic Rhyme to read what he decided to be too determinedly preaching, and Millais never read anything altho’ he had a real genius in getting others to tell him the results of their reading and their thoughts thereon[.] I have never yet read any book with blind submission but these first books of yours which I met with were a real treasure, and all of your later books have been the more precious from my remembrance of the benefit which you conferred on me at first.¹⁹

Modern assessments of the Pre-Raphaelite work also confirm Ruskin’s inspirational power; as Landow notices, “*Modern Painters*, [...] not only gave [Hunt’s] painting new purpose and method but also led him towards the faith which they required. *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* makes it clear that one of Ruskin’s most important influences came in his explication of typological symbolism which reconciled realism with elaborate iconography.”²⁰

¹⁶ Landow, “The Influence of John Ruskin.”

¹⁷ Landow, “The Influence of John Ruskin.”

¹⁸ Landow, “The Influence of John Ruskin.”

¹⁹ Landow, “The Influence of John Ruskin.”

²⁰ Landow, “The Influence of John Ruskin.”

Clearly, Pre-Raphaelitism also draws on an earlier anti-academic revolutionary, William Blake. The influence is especially seen in the ideal of sister arts; as Stein explains, “[Rossetti’s] concept of the sister arts follows Blake in seeing as their essential connection the artist’s grasp of truths beyond nature.”²¹ What Rossetti found in Blake was the visionary character of his work and the distinctive style as an assertion of spiritual vision.²² More generally, Blake’s vivid colouring, sharp outlining and intensity of images all resemble those of the Pre-Raphaelites. It is this intensity that makes the supernatural element in Blake’s painting so clear. In poetry, as Stein notices, Rossetti shares Blake’s belief in the interconnection of spiritual and erotic love – with an emphasis on frankness about the latter. Blake’s physicality is one of the sources of Pre-Raphaelite sensuousness, which is particularly visible in Rossetti’s writing. However, critics point to essential differences as far as the achievements of both poet-painters are concerned: Rossetti lacks Blake’s intensity, simplicity and force,²³ and has no religious vision which would furnish his work with a unifying principle and hence clarity.²⁴

In Pre-Raphaelite attempts to combine realism and symbolism, an important influence was the work of William Hogarth, a believer in England’s obligation to establish her own form of art.²⁵ Hogarth soon became a hero for, first of all, Hunt; what appealed to the Pre-Raphaelites was his courageous individualism and resistance to the attacks of critics. They also shared his resolute attitude towards their home country; he glorified the middle class and blamed the aristocracy and the wealthy as well as the English Church for the nation’s moral and artistic shortcomings. According to Hogarth, lack of support for the arts was a chief cause of the sad state of painting. Hunt once pointed out that “the sham art that we have got in our churches has been tolerated so long because art is considered to be properly an indulgence for the rich.”²⁶ Opposing Reynolds, who had sought to make the artist a member of the aristocracy, Hogarth placed creators among the middle classes. His

²¹ Stein, *The Ritual of Interpretation*, p. 126.

²² Stein, *The Ritual of Interpretation*, p. 126.

²³ Stein, *The Ritual of Interpretation*, p. 127.

²⁴ John Heath-Stubbs, “Pre-Raphaelitism and the Aesthetic Withdrawal,” in: *Pre-Raphaelitism: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. James Sambrook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 174.

²⁵ George P. Landow, “The Influence of William Hogarth on Pre-Raphaelite Integrated Symbolism,” *Replete with Meaning: William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism, The Victorian Web*, ed. George P. Landow, March 2004, <<http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/whh/replete/hogarth.html>>.

²⁶ quoted in: George P. Landow, “The Influence of William Hogarth on Pre-Raphaelite Integrated Symbolism,” *Replete with Meaning: William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism, The Victorian Web*, ed. George P. Landow, March 2004, <<http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/whh/replete/hogarth.html>>.

chief contribution to Pre-Raphaelite thought was his successful combination of realism with elaborate iconography. Moreover, he used language to clarify the meaning of his images, which, needless to say, considerably appealed to the Pre-Raphaelites, who employed documents, labels, and inscriptions within their pictures to intensify the effect of their visual images.²⁷

IV. THE TECHNIQUE

The novelty of Pre-Raphaelite art lies partly in the employment of specific methods of painting, such as the technique of putting the white ground on the canvas and covering it with paint while the surface was still wet. Another routine consisted in the inversion of the usual order in which particular layers of a painting are covered: Pre-Raphaelite artists tended to paint the background prior to the elements of the foreground. Another feature of Pre-Raphaelite painting is the attention to detail which has its consequences in the photographic qualities of the images; still, as Prettejohn notices, the Pre-Raphaelites go beyond this – not merely *imitating* reality in a photographic way but *enhancing* it [emphasis mine].²⁸ This enhancement is often achieved by a “digital approach” to reality, as Prettejohn calls it, which is technically accomplished by, for instance, painting the individual elements of physical reality in a very literal way, as in Hunt’s *Claudio and Isabella*, where each strand of hair is painted separately with individual brushstrokes, forming a one-to-one correspondence between the hairs of the fur and the artist’s brushstrokes.²⁹ Such a technique is entirely based on careful observation: a well-known fact about the Brotherhood is that they painted exclusively in direct contact with their subjects or models; in the case of a landscape or a natural sight, the whole creative process usually took place in an open-air situation.

What outraged the Royal Academy about Pre-Raphaelite painting was the bright, vivid colouring; bold, dispersed lighting and the use of courageous (even clashing) juxtapositions of hues. Yet another aspect of Pre-Raphaelite anti-Academism can be noticed in the non-hierarchical composition of paintings: there is no central point on which the attention of the viewer immediately rests and focuses. As a result, the spectator’s gaze becomes activated and decentred; critics emphasise

²⁷ Landow, “The Influence of William Hogarth on Pre-Raphaelite Integrated Symbolism.”

²⁸ Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 186.

²⁹ Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 144.

the paintings' ability to invite the viewer to take pleasure in looking³⁰ (or actually "watching," as this word better renders the active forms of looking). The viewer of a Pre-Raphaelite picture has the rare opportunity to experience a simultaneous, dismembered gaze. The collective features of Pre-Raphaelite painting include also such a defiant technique as the deliberate distortion of perspective which results in the flatness of the pictures (e.g., *Isabella, Ophelia or Ferdinand Lured by Ariel*). The effect of the compositions' planar appearance is achieved by the confusion between the foreground, the middle ground and the background: examining some Pre-Raphaelite works, it is not easy to distinguish between these traditionally separate levels of observation.

V. FEATURES OF PRE-RAPHAELITISM: DETAIL – SYMBOL – REALISM

The "realism" of Pre-Raphaelite painting is a distinguishing technical feature of the movement's art; its emergence was triggered by the choice of models: unprofessional, working-class acquaintances, family members or lovers. These real-life characters became actors in Pre-Raphaelite paintings; the Pre-Raphaelites identified their models with the characters in the paintings, equipping the mythological or historical figures with human qualities. In many cases, the careful choice of "material" actually led to their painting the models instead of representing figures from mythology or history. The features of the models always dominate, regardless of the subject of the attempted portrayal, be it the Virgin Mary, Pandora or Lilith. Elizabeth Prettejohn, basing her conclusions on Henry Wallis' *Chatterton*, attempts an interesting study of this characteristic of Pre-Raphaelite painting. This critic follows Hans-Georg Gadamer's distinction between portraits, subject pictures, and a third type of portraiture – a combination of the two previous types – in which imaginative content mingles with the features of a portrait.³¹ Pre-Raphaelite pictures fall into the third category; even in the most obvious examples of portraits with recognizable models, their identity disappears and they can be treated as types rather than flesh-and-bone human beings.³²

³⁰ Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, pp. 186-188.

³¹ Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, pp. 194-5.

³² Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 195.

Pre-Raphaelite attention to detail is often analysed in terms of its accurate depiction of reality. The realistic detail is supposed to imitate the perceived, physical real. In painting, it is noticeable in the particularities of botany, clothing and phrenology; in poetry – in the amalgamation of seemingly irrelevant images. In both cases, however, the particulars bear functions surpassing the visual and the imitative ones. As has been mentioned, the detail in Pre-Raphaelite painting is directly connected with a particular technique of painting, and this use of individual brushstrokes to create individual elements of reality suggests a desire for faithful, naturalistic or photographic imitation. Yet, in fact, Pre-Raphaelite art goes beyond that: by enhancing the real, the pictures acquire the capacity to convey elements that could not be noticed in real-life contact with the depicted setting. This is probably what critics call the “microscopic” quality of Pre-Raphaelite detail: the over-exactness and augmentation of what is represented.³³ It is true that the microscopic is not connected with the magnification but rather with the diminution of the object, but it is also associated with an exactness which can only be noticed with the use of a piece of optical equipment, rather than with the naked eye.

Poetic detail serves a parallel purpose: no one would normally notice a dragon-fly, hanging “like a blue thread loosened from the sky”³⁴ (Rossetti’s “Silent Noon”) nor would one immediately distinguish between the green and the yellow lichen growing on the stone of an idyllic castle (Morris’s “Golden Wings”). Such verbal images bear traces of the same kind of impressionistic exaggeration of the seemingly insignificant as is witnessed in painting. This is also what makes Pre-Raphaelite poetry so close to visual art: the overindulgence in sets of sharp images which embellish or, actually, dismember a poem. A look at a Pre-Raphaelite painting is always fragmented and decentred owing to the wealth of detail; a large part of Pre-Raphaelite verse is equally dispersed. The “realism” of the poetic detail can be questioned in view of the above, but the realist aim of the particularising tendency is evident: the goal is to make the dreaminess of the Pre-Raphaelite imagery more accessible, almost palpable. Moreover, realism also serves as a means to reduce the distance between the reader/viewer and the image. The more common details one notices, the closer to the represented world one is. On the other hand, the further the

³³ Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 172.

³⁴ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. William Michael Rossetti (London: Ellis, 1911), p. 81.

reader/viewer departs from the ugliness of Victorian reality, the better, from the perspective of Pre-Raphaelite ideology.

The quality of the detail that combines the poetic with the painterly is also its symbolic value. Clearly influenced by the French Symbolists, the Pre-Raphaelites did not, however, achieve the status of their counterparts. Pre-Raphaelite symbolism is straightforward in its surface meanings, and the choice of the symbols' sources is crucial here: the mythological icons and the medieval canons did not tolerate games with significations. Another influential resource, typological symbolism, became a religiously hollow source in the Pre-Raphaelite work, but in this case, it is the very "emptying" the religious symbols of their meanings that is intriguing. Rossetti achieves that in his *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* and *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*: both paintings include images frequently exploited in devotional portrayals; still, for Rossetti they serve as purely aesthetic accessories.

William Holman Hunt's desire to marry realism with iconography was shared by the other members of the brotherhood. This fusion was achieved partly through a specific usage of symbols: commonplace objects were employed to mirror "spiritual truths" as Hunt's *The Shadow of Death* and *The Light of the World* and Rossetti's aforementioned paintings prove. These works include traditional religious emblems but also some that seem out-of-place, which amplifies the connection between the ordinary and the spiritual. Another specific feature of Pre-Raphaelite symbolism and a proof of the unorthodoxy of their approach is the fact that symbols appearing in paintings were often explained in counterpart poems or prose works. There exists a connection between realism and symbolism in Pre-Raphaelite art for, as some critics suggest, the two aims are not contradictory but interdependent in Pre-Raphaelitism.³⁵ The correlation emerges as the so-called "symbolic realism" in the Brotherhood's output: it consists in the addition of symbolic meanings to mundane objects and in the juxtapositions of the realistic and the symbolic in the structure of the verbal and visual works.

It is hard to call Pre-Raphaelite art realistic by any of the known definitions of the word. The overblown ideas of the "photographic" qualities of painting, "truthfulness" to nature and the commonplace that surfaces in poems and paintings

³⁵ Herbert Sussman, *Fact into Figure: Typology in Carlyle, Ruskin, and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1979). pp. 4-5.

are all easy to defy.³⁶ As has already been suggested, it is not nature “as it is” that is represented in the paintings or life “as it is”: physical reality is always filtered through what the Pre-Raphaelites used to call inner experience. From one perspective, this vague expression can be interpreted as – depending on circumstances – individual perception, imagination, emotion or, simply, poetic technique. Also, in many cases, reality is simulated and idealised, “more real” than could be physically perceived. Pre-Raphaelite realism consists in the faithful rendition of what is conceptualised, not in a mimetic representation of any actual reality. Blunt imitation was simply impossible in view of the Pre-Raphaelite choice of subjects, which was based on Biblical, medieval and mythological sources. In fact, through archaism and detachment the artists wanted to create a reality parallel to their contemporary one; it has been said that they achieved mastery at *real-ising* the dream.

Pre-Raphaelite “truth to nature” is a misleading concept, since what was meant to be faithful is no longer such once it enters the painterly image and is enhanced, differing from what could actually be seen in literal perception, simulated to fit the conception of the artist. The representation question arises also in the case of the depiction of human figures. The Pre-Raphaelites used ordinary people as models not to imitate the common or the real but to endow those human, existing vessels with the personality of the figure the models were to represent in a painting. Holy Mary assumed the bodily composition of Christina Rossetti, Lady Lilith started to exist as Fanny Cornforth, and St. Joseph was represented as Millais’s father. The models were not only “actors” used to perform as certain imaginary characters, but they also served to furnish the figures with human features. In view of that fact, this overall assessment of Pre-Raphaelite “truth to nature” and “sincerity to inner experience” concludes with an assertion that, paradoxically, the *unreal* prevails in the Brotherhood’s achievements or, in other words, that the artists reach the realm of *simulated* reality.

³⁶ Barthes teaches us a simple truth that there is a difference between the photographic image and the painterly one: the former object is the thing “that has been there” Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 76.

VI. THEMES

A. MEDIEVALISM

Pre-Raphaelite interest in the Middle Ages as the epoch that appealed most to imagination coincided with their artistic credo, which expressed the intention to revive the artistic ideals that preceded Raphael's work. Still, the main motive for the fascination with the medieval was the urge to find detachment, to escape from the epoch and its industrial ugliness, materialism and moral bonds. Medieval dream worlds perfectly facilitated the creation of the unreal in Pre-Raphaelite work: supernatural settings and characters, the chivalric code and ideal love formed an antidote to everyday Victorianism that the painters and poets strived to produce. They replaced Victorian elitism with medieval folklore to achieve simplicity of expression and subject matter. The source of Pre-Raphaelite medievalism lies mainly in literature, which is noticeable in a few characteristics of their work. First, it surfaces in the employment of genres and techniques – ballads, romances and dream visions. Second, the usage of themes from medieval authors is also significant: Dante served as a paragon for Rossetti; Chaucer was frequently employed by Morris, Burne-Jones and Rossetti. Third, the Pre-Raphaelites used the Middle Ages transformed by their contemporaries: Tennyson, Swinburne or by the Romantics like Keats.

What these artists sought in the Middle Ages were the supernatural, the simplicity and the religiousness of the epoch, and its idealism about feelings. Christina Rossetti found her poetic world among goblins, abused maids, ideal (although unhappy) love and religious devotion. William Morris focused on the folk supernatural and the knightly honour connected with courtly love. Pre-Raphaelite paintings are filled with elements of medievalism: the folk lore from Hunt's *The Eve of St. Agnes*, the Dante and Beatrice series created by Rossetti and the recurrent Lady of Shallot theme employed by Hunt and Millais all involve the idealism of romantic love exercised at different levels. The Pre-Raphaelite attraction to the Middle Ages could be classified as pure archaism or a longing for an escapist dream world if one did not take into consideration the spiritual depth of the epoch in the context of the artist- viewer/reader relationship, which involved a sort of shared sensibility and unified mental approach on both sides which was first discerned by Ruskin.³⁷ It is

³⁷ Stein, *The Ritual of Interpretation*, p. 178.

this unity that fascinates the Brethren in view of the Victorian elitist split, not to mention other, more subtle disparities and divisions of the epoch.

B. RELIGION

Another hallmark of Pre-Raphaelitism is its professed religiousness. In this respect, the circumstances of the Brethren's religious involvement are significant, including the decline of faith in Victorian times, on the one hand, and the emerging multiplicity of beliefs, on the other. The result was a metaphysical look at the problem of faith; it emerges from the Pre-Raphaelites' works in spite of these works' religious indifference (especially Rossetti's). In painting, their effort in this realm can be investigated on the basis of two main tendencies, the first one consisting in the desire to make biblical scenes "real" through the addition of commonplace objects, settings and characters, as in the case of many of Millais's and Rossetti's paintings. The second direction consists in locating biblical events in authentic settings and historicising them, as can be witnessed in Hunt's late paintings. Yet, a third way can also be distinguished: in works like *The Blessed Damozel* and *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, Rossetti attempts to re-imagine the psychological states of the portrayed figures. Prettejohn stresses the visual quality of both paintings, seeing this aspect of the Pre-Raphaelite project as an attempt to make religious truths discernible.³⁸

The spectrum of these artists' approach towards religious themes ranges from the most literal depictions, such as *Christ in the House of His Parents* by Millais or *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* by Hunt, to spiritualised ones, like Hunt's *The Light of the World*. This variety reflects the distance between the Pre-Raphaelites' attempts at "realising" transcendental truths in their works and their metaphorical reflections on those truths. As to the methods, the Pre-Raphaelites used a variety of symbolic devices, but the prevailing strategy involved the use of biblical symbolism combined with ornamental emblems. This purely aesthetic, secularised approach was especially characteristic of Rossetti. His use of the biblical realm can be compared to his application of myth, the Middle Ages or literary tradition: the Bible serves Rossetti as a source of inspiration, certain material to put on canvas or employ in a poem. The lack of devoutness in his work did not result from a "personal" interpretation of religion, but rather from a distanced, *a*-personal and universal look at religious dogmas. It allowed Rossetti to play on meanings, to add

³⁸ Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 246.

his own readings and de-mystify the realm; he attained that, for instance, in *The Blessed Damozel* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* by making the sacred more fleshly. Rossetti married the earthly with the heavenly to show the closeness of these domains and the approachability of sanctity.

C. SENSUOUSNESS AND FEMININITY

As the Victorian Era developed, literary ideas about women's role in society evolved. The concept of the "angel in the house" that permeated Victorian literature became the emblem of the expected role of a woman in society as an innocent and domestic being. The other pole of this strictly black-and-white moral dichotomy consisted of the image of the "fallen woman": a woman corrupted by sex. Such a representation of femininity was dramatic: once lead astray, the woman could not possibly become socially acceptable again. Two of the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood showed special interest in depictions of femininity: Burne-Jones was fascinated with medievalised eroticism, and Rossetti showed male worship of the fantasy woman in his "fair lady." Jan Marsh, in her book *The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood*, asserts that these artists rendered women as depersonalised and decorative, reducing them to an arrangement of body parts.³⁹ The effect was not an individual woman but an aesthetic type composed of recognisable parts. This view is shared by Helene E. Roberts in her discussion of female portrayals in the first years of Victoria's reign.⁴⁰ Elizabeth Lee, quoting these assertions, partly agrees with them, contending that the Pre-Raphaelite treatment of female figures not only leads to the objectification of women but also to the dismemberment of their bodies and identities. Concluding, Lee observes, however, that such an artistic discourse "goes beyond objectification towards a sort of visual synecdoche: taking the parts to represent the whole."⁴¹

Pre-Raphaelite sensuousness appalled a Victorian audience who was not familiar with the sincere treatment of human body and sexuality introduced by the Pre-Raphaelites. By no means were those portrayals vulgar or explicit in the literal

³⁹ Jan Marsh, *The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), quoted in: Elizabeth Lee, "The Femme Fatale as Object" in *The Victorian Web*, ed. George P. Landow, April 1997, Brown University, August 2000, <<http://landow.stg.brown.edu/victorian/gender/object.html>>.

⁴⁰ Helen E. Roberts, "Marriage, Redundancy or Sin: The Painter's View of Women in the First Twenty-Five Years of Victoria's Reign," in *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. 45-76.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Lee, "The Femme Fatale as Object" in *The Victorian Web*, ed. George P. Landow, April 1997, Brown University, August 2000 <<http://landow.stg.brown.edu/victorian/gender/object.html>>.

sense; it is enough to say that open nudity appears only in a few paintings from the Pre-Raphaelite collection. It is rather the truthful treatment of the human body that shocked Victorians, since the notion of realistic detail refers also to the intricacies of human carnal structure, including non-ideal representations of bodily deformities and ugliness. What critics often refer to as the “Pre-Raphaelite woman” is not a perfect manifestation of female beauty: it is rather a realistic presentation of a woman as perceived by a particular artist. Rossetti’s completion of *Bocca Baciata* in 1859 marks the emergence of this type of female beauty in his work. The painting, Titianesque in style, presents one of the most voluptuous women in the artist’s imagery: the large, red-haired “Rossetti Woman” with a columnar neck and sensual lips. Needless to say, such a model of female attractiveness differed from the established patterns of idealised beauty that had existed in art history.

Martin Danahay, in his article *Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Virtual Bodies*, introduces the term “virtual body” to differentiate between the actual body and its visual and poetic representations, referring to a realm beyond the physical dimension of the female body in painting and in poetry. Exclusively carnal manifestations of women were not frequent, nor were they that significant in Rossetti’s art. What the artist was trying to achieve was the full picture of woman, as he stressed in his prose manifesto *Hand and Soul*. The quest for the “inner self” of a woman (trying to recompose it from the physical image) develops, according to Danahay, into another quality of the “virtual body.” Nevertheless, the designation “body” can be misleading here; in fact, the author’s conception calls for the presence of a “virtual soul”: an entity pertaining to the spiritual level of being. Therefore, replacing the “virtual body” with a “virtual woman” will emphasise the truth that at the level of the “inner life,” one confronts such notions as the personality of the represented woman and her literary origin. Additionally, the domain of the spirit is conditioned by moral judgements (or just deliberations): in terms of traditional, universal morality, Rossetti’s female images are usually analysed by his critics along the “Madonna – Whore” continuum, although, in effect, the two extremes overlap in a large portion of Rossetti’s works.

As to the supposed sexuality of Pre-Raphaelite painting, it is always only alluded to, concealed, unattainable for visual perception without the textual explanation; such is the case in Millais’s *Mariana* or Hunt’s *The Lady of Shalott*. The poses those ladies assume become sexual once the context is provided. Undercover

eroticism is often smuggled by the Pre-Raphaelites into their work, but more blatant representations of human intimate life are not exceptional. Isabella's and Lorenzo's love creates sexual tension in the scene at the table in Millais's *Isabella*, the shepherd's advances at the peasant girl in Hunt's *The Hireling Shephard* show quite vividly the erotic aim of his playfulness, just as Guinevre's unmade bed also quite openly "tells the story" of the previous night in Morris's *Guenevre*. The act of veiling erotic undertones accounts for the enigmatic character of some of Pre-Raphaelite achievements. This secrecy also shows the repressed character of human sexual behaviour, corresponding with the general aura of the Victorian times; still, in Pre-Raphaelite art, the aura finds its criticism and condemnation, for example, in numerous representations of compassion for the psychologically restrained characters.

Naturally, the Pre-Raphaelite vision of sexuality was hazardous. The frankness of the Pre-Raphaelite approach towards carnality and the compassion towards prostitutes enraged the Victorian elites. Another controversial issue was the special economic context attached to the representations of body, particularly apparent in the tendency to portray "fallen women." Representing prostitution shifts the emphasis from carnality to the body-as-commodity and erases the focus on the sensual and the aesthetic, raising the socio-economic dimension of the issue. What could have also shocked was the artists' treatment of sanctity. Critics attacked Millais for portraying the Holy Family in a realistic way: not idealised, but deformed and ugly. Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* is a faithful portrayal of a teenage girl just entering the stage of puberty, not the future mother of Christ. The Blessed Damozel, having entered heaven, still dreams of earthly love, making the bar on which she leans warm with her bosom. From a different point of view, the whole gallery of *femmes fatales* represented in Pre-Raphaelite art functions as a contrast to the traditional Victorian view of femininity as subordinate, domestic and procreative. Pre-Raphaelite images of women oppose the view of womanhood as passive and compliant; these figures act, fight and use their sexuality as a weapon. Generally, the Pre-Raphaelite visualisation of women is directed against Victorian misogyny: they show woman as an active, independent being, which is not consistent with a purely aesthetic view of womanhood.

* * *

The literature-painting connection is one of the main principles governing the Brotherhood's work. The most obvious evidence of the alleged "literariness" of the Brotherhood's painting is the use of themes taken from Dante, Keats, Tennyson, Chaucer and Shakespeare, to name the most frequent. As will be explained in the following parts of the dissertation, which are more strictly devoted to the *ut pictura poesis* question, the Pre-Raphaelites took a highly individual, reader-oriented approach to literary sources, reconstructing them and putting them in new contexts. Still, associations between painting and literature emerge also in other fields of Pre-Raphaelite creation: as poetic reflections on other artists' paintings (e.g. Rossetti's *Sonnets for Pictures*), as paintings that portray individual scenes from works of literature (like *Isabella*, *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel*, *Lady of Shalott*), and as Rossetti's *double works of art* which exist as interconnected pairs of poems and paintings. The most significant and the most extensive area of the word-image relationships in the Pre-Raphaelite work is actually a gathering of paintings and poems that do not form any formal connections with the counterpart art. Therefore, the last part of the present study concentrates on the poetic qualities of painting and the painterly features of Pre-Raphaelite poetry; the general objective of this section is to show the phenomenon of the interpenetration of these arts, using examples that stray from the obvious, much researched and much anthologised cases of *ut pictura poesis* in the Pre-Raphaelite work.

Chapter 2: DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI'S *DOUBLE WORK OF ART* AS A DYNAMIC REPRESENTATION OF THE POEM-PAINTING FUSION

I. THE HOLOGRAPHIC NATURE OF THE *DOUBLE WORK OF ART*

The phenomenon of the *double work of art* (often compared to Blake's "composite art") in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's work can be traced back to his very first major painting, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, which Rossetti equipped with a pair of sonnets written while he was working on the picture. During its first exhibition, the visual work was accompanied by a piece of gold-leaf paper with the text of the sonnets on it. Rossetti repeated the procedure with a set of other paintings; still, executing a picture and writing a poem which comments or elaborates on the visual is not the only possible direction in the composition of a double work. Technically, in one case, *The Blessed Damsel*, the text of the poem preceded the pictorial counterpart, and some other pairs are believed to have been created "simultaneously." In the following discussion, however, the question of precedence and chronology is of lesser importance. Regardless of the formal divisions introduced later on in the chapter, this study will focus on the reception of the *double work of art* – on the reader/viewer's perspective and the process through which he or she gets in touch with the artist's vision embodied in the work. This vision splits into two forms of artistic expression and has to be translated into separate dialects of the Sister Arts. The case is obviously specific: the reader/viewer has to grasp a double meaning radiating from an amalgamation of the visual and the poetic. Yet, a question arises at this point: is this meaning really double? This uncertainty develops into one of the key notions to be discussed in the analysis of Rossetti's specific way of joining the arts.

The alleged coherent unity implied in the term *double work of art* is misleading. In fact, Rossetti presumes the pairing of his works in the creative process, but what he achieves in most cases is a diffused unity of the two components. The formal coupling of a painting and a poem makes the percipient comprehend them similarly at the outset; the initial, surface reading places the visual and the poetic at the same level of importance. However, trying to form a single unity out of the two elements involves a further stage of reading, a joint interpretation involving the evaluation of the "input" of each of the components to determine the final meaning of the *double work of art*. The

input may be comprised, for instance, of the number and variety of references, connotations, metaphors, symbols, etc. This interpretive process resembles projecting a hologram composed of two different sources of laser beams: figuratively speaking, one of those beams stands for the poetic, and the other for the painterly input. The image that the perceiver obtains is an assemblage of pixels which derive from the two sources and are subsequently projected on a plane. Yet, the two sources of holographic light are not completely disjointed; there is an element of overlay, a dialogue between the painting and the poem at the level of projection. The overlap results from the artist's employment of the same vision to create two corresponding works, but it is also conditioned by the fact that the two works communicate, more or less intensely, showing the same components of the primary vision, such as colours, symbols, expressions, objects etc. Nevertheless, communication feeds on differences, not on similarities: a certain "information gap" has to be introduced in order to communicate successfully, and this is what the *double work of art* also consists in.

Any attempt at disrupting the *double work of art* and interpreting each of the works separately results in partial comprehension. To avoid that, the reader/viewer has to consider the fixed hologram, not the individual beams of light that generate it; only after the rays interact with each other are they able to produce the fusion of information needed for a full interpretation of the double. The interaction consists in an exchange of meanings which are already "processed" and partially understood: they result from the independent interpretations of the poem and the painting. Only after this exchange of the separate pieces of information is one allowed to consider the outcome as a *double work of art*. The hologram is not a flat, mute and passive billboard, though. It talks to the percipient, presents itself, trying to start a "conversation." The consequence is another dialogue: one concerning the acquisition of the *double work of art* by the reader/viewer. At this point, the percipient is confronted with the holographic image which echoes in his body, with which he is negotiating meanings through the subject-object relation.¹

While on the subject of the percipient of the *double work of art*, it is remarkable that Rossetti himself seems to differentiate between his readers and his spectators. Some of them need help to fully understand a poem or a painting; that is why the artist equips his works with explanations. This is also the reason why he creates parallels, repeating the ideas of a vision in both forms, as if aiding poetry interpreters with a poem to help

¹ Jacek Migasiński, *Merleau-Ponty* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1995), pp. 69-70.

them decipher a painting and, *vice versa*, equipping art critics with an illustration of a poem. However, the poet does not want to offend either the reader or the viewer by underestimating their interpretive abilities. He does not simply illustrate as a painter, nor does he merely describe as a poet – he supplies and reinforces. The perceiver is obliged to make references, decipher metaphors, and notice “significant details.”² The quality of the reception is conditioned by the success of the negotiations between the percipient and the hologram; these negotiations take place within the viewer’s body and involve his ability to visualize the “invisible,” which is the same action as the one in which the artist is involved, according to Maurice Merleau-Ponty. For Merleau-Ponty, an artist does not show the spectator his “imagination” or a metaphorical vision of the world; instead, he makes up new worlds, rediscovers anything that is not visible and makes it visible.³ The artist gathers up the shattered remains of a vision together with the broken glass of his imaginative powers, adds all his artistic skill and puts together a puzzle which eventually forms a work of art. Nothing of that final entity, though, is previously “known” to the spectator, which undermines the notion of the imitative quality of art. Is the work of art familiar to the artist himself? Not until the moment he “sees” it conceptually, from within, from the inside of his body.⁴

Yet, this does not mean that receiving the *double work of art* equals decoding the artist’s vision, that the two processes are equivalent. Merleau-Ponty asserts that the artist does not create a comprehensible message when painting a picture; the work of art is like a man’s first word, and its author is not sure if it makes any sense.⁵ Consequently, one can risk the statement that the artist’s role ends at the level of producing a work of art. Still, the *double work of art* is not completely open to interpretation; it is the very quality of being a double that imposes limits. The twofold structure not only expands but also reduces meanings and interpretations; it adds but also takes away pieces of information. The recipient’s role is to choose the route of interpretation, to find elements that are common to both parts of the double, to eliminate the superfluous messages, and to arrive at the essential meaning of the *double work of art* as a whole, rather than as a compilation of disjointed units.

² phrase coined by Jerome J. McGann in “Rossetti’s Significant Details,” *Victorian Poetry*, vol. VII, no. 1 (1969), pp. 41-54.

³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” in: *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson, trans. Michael B. Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), p. 127.

⁴ Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” pp. 123-124.

⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Cézanne’s Doubt,” in: *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson, trans. Michael B. Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), p. 69.

Various definitions of the *double work of art* have been formulated by Rossetti's critics; some call it "reciprocal illustration,"⁶ while others describe the phenomenon as an example of symbiosis in which one medium expands the percipient's experience of the other.⁷ Many commentators concentrate on the formal coupling of a poem and a painting in the shape of the former's being inscribed in the latter within the canvas or on the frame. Rossetti himself once announced that painting and poetry appear in "the same relation to each other as beauty does in man and woman."⁸ Leaving aside its authorial legitimacy, the statement exquisitely corresponds to the hologram metaphor employed above to illustrate the complex relationship between the seemingly disjointed components of the *double work of art*. To show that the interconnection is indeed multifaceted and that the established definitions and classifications need some improvement, in the remainder of the chapter, Rossetti's *double works of art* (only pairs in which both elements are of Rossetti's authorship are taken into consideration) are classified according to two types of painting – poem combinations. First, parallel relations of subordinative and coordinative kinds will be discussed; the second group is composed of works in disparate relationships, assuming the form of explications, comments and supplements.

II. PARALLEL RELATIONS IN THE *DOUBLE WORK OF ART*: COORDINATION AND SUBORDINATION

A group of Rossetti's *double works of art* can be analysed in terms of the parallel relations between the particular elements of the pair. The parallelism can be spotted in the following areas: first, the amount of input coming from each of the elements of the double; second, the content's referential capability; third, the richness of symbolic and metaphorical figures related to the main meaning; and finally, the thematic correlation of the double's halves. (I deliberately use the word "half" to describe the *double work of art* as, in this case, the separate parts of the combination are essentially closest to the algebraic halves.) The parallel interaction within a pair of works requires, however, further explication and subdivision.

⁶ Susan Beegel, "Rossetti's Sonnets and Paintings on Mary's Girlhood: A Case Study in Reciprocal Illustration," *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, vol. II, no. 2 (1982), p. 5.

⁷ Maryan Winn Ainsworth, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Double Work of Art*, New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1976), p. 4.

⁸ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. William Michael Rossetti (London: Ellis, 1911), p. 606.

There is a possibility of a complete overlapping of the two sources seen in the holographic perspective mentioned in the introduction. In such a case, neither the poem nor the painting conveys any more or any less information than the other part. The inputs are virtually identical, and so is the referential power; the two parts are perfectly correlated as far as their general meanings are concerned. Needless to say, that is the rarest kind of *double work of art*, represented in the following part of the chapter by the example of *The Blessed Damozel*. Special cases within this type of relations are works that can be categorised as “part and parcel” of each other: a full interpretation of one of the elements of the pair is impossible without a simultaneous analysis of the other part. In other words, neither of them can exist without its twin. That type of coordination is exemplified later on in the discussion by Rossetti’s early Marian works.

Both variations of such coordinate relations can be compared to bonds which are, likewise, parallel but also furnished with a trace of subordination between them. This inferiority or superiority results from the intensity with which the particular parts contribute to the reading of the double. In this case, a shift in the perception of the *double work of art* is marked: it rests in the repositioning of the beams forming the *double work of art* as a hologram; as a result, the hologram is not a homogeneous projection but rather a combination of two images that do not fully fit the area reserved for the seeing of the *double work of art*. The shift can assume different magnitudes, and the positioning of the holographic projection can fluctuate. To what extent the elements of *double work of art* can be dislocated will be the focus of all of the following analyses of Rossetti’s works. First, however, the coordinate relations will be scrutinised.

One of a few *double works of art* in which the poetic component precedes its counterpart painting is *The Blessed Damozel*, finished in 1878. Rossetti wrote the ballad in 1874, clearly under Dante Alighieri’s influence: the damozel (the French word also implies medievalism) is a rendering of Dante’s Beatrice.⁹ The poetic work is replete with dichotomies, and they all seem to emerge from one fundamental opposition: the dichotomy of body and soul. However, in this case, not only do we witness the connection between the flesh and the spirit, but also a strange combination of heavenly chastity with earthly sensual desires. The lady residing currently in heaven prides herself on her attributes of sanctity: three lilies, seven stars in her hair and “a white rose of Mary’s gift.” She is one of “God’s choristers” and she is assisted by virgins; still,

⁹ “*The Blessed Damozel: Literary*,” *The Rossetti Archive*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, August 2001, <<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/1-1847.s244.raw.html>>.

looking downwards from her “gold bar of Heaven,”¹⁰ she keeps weeping, as if disregarding the heavenly bliss that surrounds her.



D.G. Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel*

The *dramatis personae* of the ballad are also present in the accompanying painting. The Damozel “Leans out from the gold bar of heaven”;¹¹ the bar in the picture is visualised by a wooden divider put across the canvas. The remaining praedella is occupied by the Damozel’s lover; consequently, this section of the painting becomes the domain of the terrestrial. The angels, who assist the lady, seem to guard the literal border between heaven and earth and prohibit anybody from passing it. The woman’s new friends are visible in the background “amid their loving games,”¹² reminding her of sensual enjoyment. She does not care, though, about the love she is able to experience in heaven. Clearly, the Damozel feels out of place in paradise; hence, she spends a lot of time leaning on the bar, in which way she makes it warm with her bosom.

¹⁰ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 3.

¹¹ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 3.

¹² Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Poems* (London: Ellis, 1870), p. 3. changed to “Mid deathless love’s acclaims” in later editions.

The paradox of the situation is stressed by the lady herself, as she wants to combine two contrasting kinds of affection: the saintly, spiritual one and the earthly, sensual one. She wants the lover to come up to heaven, wear an aureole and, together with her partner, join the chaste pairs of lovers:

When round his head the aureole clings,
And he is clothed in white,
I'll take his hand and go with him
To the deep wells of light;
As unto a stream we will step down,
And bathe there in God's sight.¹³

Their love will be attended by Mary but only until the Damozel and her lover have an opportunity to ask God, through Mary's aid, to "live as once on earth":¹⁴ in a physical, un-heavenly way. Throughout the ballad, the lover is a sober narrator, and it is his point of view that we acquire while reading the poem. He is conscious of the impossibility of realizing the Damozel's dreams. Rossetti deliberately creates literal and artificial distances between the lover's and the Damozel's worlds using the divider in the painting and the parentheses in the poem. What is more, the earthly human being realizes his moral inferiority:

But shall God lift
To endless unity
The soul whose likeness with thy soul
Was but its love for thee?¹⁵

In the final reflection, the Damozel herself seems to share the lover's skepticism in the act of weeping that is depicted in the last lines of the ballad. Jerome McGann in *Rossetti's Significant Details* maintains that Rossetti's aim in the work was to juxtapose earthly love with heavenly love in his own idiosyncratic way, without confusing the two terms.¹⁶ McGann suggests that Rossetti actually replaces Love as agape with love as Eros, which is to serve as the final solution to the problem of failing to fulfill earthly desires.¹⁷ Yet, the Damozel's tears from the last line of the poem denote Rossetti's failure to combine the two kinds of love: her love desire is not fulfilled, hence the

¹³ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 4.

¹⁴ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 5.

¹⁵ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 5.

¹⁶ Jerome J. McGann "Rossetti's Significant Details," *Victorian Poetry*, vol. VII, no. 1 (1969), pp. 50-51.

¹⁷ McGann "Rossetti's Significant Details," p. 50.

weeping. For her Eros is not “perfected” (as Mc Gann claims, referring to another poem): she stays conscious of the separation of both kinds of love.

D. M. R. Bentley emphasizes the transformation of the “golden bar” from the initial stages of the poem to “golden barriers” in the closing lines.¹⁸ In fact, the existence of the barrier is clear throughout the text, and it is also discernible in the painting: the physical obstacle is accentuated by the presence of the angels guarding the entrance to heaven and the conceptual attitude of the Damsel herself: she simply rests on the bar, being conscious of the impossibility of crossing it. The woman’s behaviour can be compared to the speaker’s attitude in Tennyson’s “Crossing the Bar”; yet, whereas the *persona* in Tennyson’s poem hopes to see the Pilot across the boundary, the Damsel looks downwards from far above, knowing she is not able to come down, and neither is her partner able to go up.

While there exists a great gap between the Damsel and her lover, there is not much disparity between the two Sister Arts in the poem-painting pairing titled *The Blessed Damsel*. The works are considered as “the epitome of the double work of art,”¹⁹ an ideal coupling which is rare in Rossetti’s oeuvre. Indeed, the work embodies the essence of what I called “parallel relation”: the cited themes from the poem are all echoed in the painting. Unquestionably, one can find minute details differentiating the components of the pair, such as the number of stars visualized in each of them (seven are mentioned in the poem and six are visible in the painting, which is not a negligible detail)²⁰ or the absence of the palms in the angels’ hands in the poetic version. Nevertheless, these particulars do not affect the core meaning of the *double work of art* which is perfectly “mirrored” in both components. “Mirroring” and “dynamic reflection” are terms used by McGann primarily to describe the relation between the Damsel and her lover, but such terminology can apply perfectly to the connection between the poem and the picture.²¹

¹⁸ D. M. R. Bentley, “‘The Blessed Damsel’: A Young Man’s Fantasy,” *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 20, no. 3&4 (1982), p. 42.

¹⁹ Barbara Gates, “Framing Sonnets – Whistler’s Quip and Rossetti’s Artistry,” *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, vol. V, no. 2 (1985), p. 28.

²⁰ “*The Blessed Damsel: Annotations to Verse*,” *The Rossetti Archive*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, August 2001,

²¹ Jerome J. McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Game that Must be Lost* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 23-26.



D.G. Rossetti, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*

One of the two sonnets that Rossetti wrote to accompany the painting *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* explicates most of the symbols used in the pictorial work. The poetic equivalent serves here as a specific guide to the painting, which remains complete without this verbal guidance. However, the poem loses its significance without its visual counterpart:

These are the symbols. On that cloth of red
 I' the centre is the Tripoint: perfect each,
 Except the second of its points, to teach
 That Christ is not yet born. The books—whose head
 Is golden Charity, as Paul hath said—
 Those virtues are wherein the soul is rich:
 Therefore on them the lily standeth, which
 Is Innocence, being interpreted.

The seven-thorn'd briar and the palm seven-leaved
 Are her great sorrow and her great reward.
 Until the end be full, the Holy One
 Abides without. She soon shall have achieved
 Her perfect purity: yea, God the Lord
 Shall soon vouchsafe His Son to be her Son.²²

In the sonnet, Rossetti offers a glossary of symbols, exploring their meaning in a religious context. The “entries” convey the significations of traditional Christian

²² Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 173.

symbols that usually occur in images of Virgin Mary: “the seven-thorn’d briar,” “the palm seven-leaved”²³ and the lily that symbolise the Trinity, according to Swafford.²⁴ Critics like McGann, Hough and Barclay question, however, the symbols’ religious significance, claiming that Rossetti deprives them of their content, as McGann puts it in his article mentioned above.²⁵ Barclay supports this view and supplements it with his idea of treating Rossetti’s symbols in the sonnet as objects of “aesthetic consumption.”²⁶ Accordingly, Hough maintains that using Christian symbolism does not mean for Rossetti employing any Christian, theological meaning.²⁷ The arguments provided by the authors are convincing; yet, Rossetti does want his viewer-reader to situate himself/herself in a religious context. If the emblems, deprived of their content, serve only as “empty” objects of aesthetic use, their value as aesthetic material is doubtful. Using a briar or a crucifix as a purely aesthetic accessory is simply hazardous: the items are closely related to religious rituals and dogmas. Moreover, not without a reason does Rossetti provide the scriptural situation in the sonnet: Christ is “not yet born”? and Mary is waiting, “ripening” in preparation to be the mother. Not only are the emblems meaningless outside a religious context, but they are also useless as far as any artistic production is concerned. Another thing is that Rossetti seems to have carefully chosen which symbols to explain, leaving out the ones that are irrelevant (e.g. the lantern by the window). He draws a map designed to show us how to read the painting in a religious way.

One of the major themes in the Virgin Mary *double work of art* is the question of temporal reference and sequence. The time-anchor of the sonnet has already been mentioned: Christ is not yet born, which fact, being perfectly discernible in the painting, precisely coordinates the two works. Mary’s current state is described by Susan Beegel as “moral growth”²⁸ and by Rossetti himself in the sonnet as achieving “perfect purity.”²⁹ This is an ambiguous statement in at least two respects: first, it is not explicitly stated in Christian doctrine that Mary had to actually *improve* morally in her girlhood; rather, she has been chosen as an already perfect being. Secondly,

²³ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 173.

²⁴ James M. Swafford, “‘The Fullness of Time’: the Early Marian Poems of D. G. Rossetti,” *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, vol. II, no. 2 (1982), p. 80.

²⁵ McGann “Rossetti’s Significant Details,” p. 52.

²⁶ John Barclay, “Consuming Artifacts: Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Aesthetic Economy,” *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 35, no. 1 (1997), p. 12.

²⁷ Graham Hough, *The Last Romantics* (New York, Barnes and Noble, 1961), pp. 54-55.

²⁸ Beegel, “Rossetti’s Sonnets and Paintings...,” p. 2.

²⁹ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 173.

commonsensical thinking raises doubts about the possibility of “achieving purity”: the state is a predisposition which can be lost rather than achieved.

The other sonnet associated with the same painting is entitled “Mary’s Girlhood”; yet, only the first part of it, the octet, directly refers to *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*:

This is that blessed Mary, pre-elect
God’s Virgin. Gone is a great while, and she
Dwelt young in Nazareth of Galilee.
Unto God’s will she brought devout respect,
Profound simplicity of intellect,
And supreme patience. From her mother’s knee
Faithful and hopeful; wise in charity;
Strong in grave peace; in pity circumspect.³⁰

Again one notices the temporal structure of the work, which, as Landow asserts, is an important contribution to the typological level.³¹ The Virgin Mary is described as “pre-elect”; the state is envisaged in the painting literally by the aureoles around her and her mother’s heads. The moment the reader witnesses “gone is a great while,” which delineation creates two tenses in the poem: the past and the past perfect as the election had taken place in a “realm outside time,”³² to use Landow’s words. Additionally, the third time reference is the moment of Annunciation, which is hinted at in the last lines of the sonnet. Still, this particular moment is not directly relevant to the painting, which portrays the previous state – the awaiting.

The girl herself, according to “Mary’s Girlhood,” possesses such qualities as “supreme patience,” faithfulness, peace and pity, all conventionally ascribed to the Virgin Mary, and, at the same time, evident in the painting. In addition, Rossetti equips Mary with some unconventional traits, such as “simplicity of intellect,” as if questioning her mental abilities, or, as Lynne Pearce notes, highlighting the virtue of her ignorance.³³ Mary is described as “quiet,” which is an image perfectly fitting the Victorian role of woman, and “hopeful,” which indicates Mary’s awareness of her future

³⁰ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 173.

³¹ George P. Landow, “‘Life Touching Lips with Immortality’: Rossetti’s Temporal Structures,” *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows; Biblical Typology in Victorian Literature, Art, and Thought*, in: *The Victorian Web*, ed. George P. Landow, August 2007, <<http://www.victorianweb.org/religion/type/ch6b.html>>.

³² Landow, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s ‘Mary’s Girlhood,’” *The Victorian Web*, ed. George P. Landow, August 2001, <<http://landow.stg.brown.edu/victorian/religion/girlhood.html>>.

³³ Lynne Pearce, *Woman/Image/Text: Readings in Pre-Raphaelite Art and Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 38.

lot. Further, Rossetti compares her to “an angel-watered lily”³⁴ (an image also visible in the painting), and the manifold symbolism of the lily is crucial here. First, it serves as a traditional, poetic and Christian symbol of Mary’s innocence, of which Rossetti assured us in the previously discussed sonnet. Secondly, it reappears in the painterly work as a double presence, placed on the pile of holy books tended by the angel, and as the pattern of Mary’s embroidery (it will appear once again in the next painting to be discussed: *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*). Mary toils on the design, instructed by St. Anne, as if the Virgin were also striving to acquire the innocence symbolised by the emerging lily; the action can indeed be treated as the symbolic act of growing chaste, “achieving purity,” and it is skillfully captured on canvass by Rossetti. Therefore, Susan Beegel’s concern about his ability to visualise such abstract processes proves superfluous.³⁵ Rossetti’s skill in this area is apparent also in another detail: the titles of the books which are piled in the centre of the composition correspond to the set of Mary’s qualities enumerated in the poem; such a meticulous parallel undoubtedly contributes to the Sister Arts’ concordance in this *double work of art*.

The portrayal of the mother of God in two sonnets and the painting is characterised by the contradiction between the divine and the human. At the moment of Annunciation, the Virgin Mary evolves from a simple Victorian teenager into a divinity. Rossetti captures the transformation pictorially in the images of the separating curtain and the adjacent window which are to serve as a symbolic dividing line between humanity and divinity. It is not a regular Rossettian window set, as the scene is situated on a veranda, so the outer space is not completely isolated from the interior. The overlapping of the two areas is reinforced by the symbolic dove which perches on a vine-stick on the veranda (which can be treated as a peculiar “border zone”), and in *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*, it actually enters the chamber freely. In other sections of *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, the combination of the human and the divine operates along quite crude lines. The visual details like the holy books which were supposedly read by the girl, the embroidery work saturated with symbolic sanctity and, finally, the most naïve operation in the painting, the aureoles around the women’s heads, do not actually bridge any gaps, but rather serve as rudimentary ornaments. In this case, Rossetti proves to be a better poet than a painter: in the sonnet none of these artificial enhancements

³⁴ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 173.

³⁵ S. Beegel in “Rossetti’s Sonnets and Paintings on Mary’s Girlhood: A Case Study in Reciprocal Illustration,” claims that moral development is a process extremely hard to visualise in painting. *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, vol. II, no. 2 (1982), p. 2.

appear. It is clear from the outset that Mary is a half-human and half-divine being, as she is referred to as “pre-elect God’s virgin,” “blessed Mary” that “near god grows and is quiet.”³⁶ Evidently, the choice of setting in the painting is not accidental either, for Rossetti purposefully damages the boundaries between the outside and the inside or, as Swafford suggests, the human and the natural.³⁷ The worlds do overlap, making the general delineation even more indistinct; the presence of St. Joachim pruning a vine outside and the fact that the branches of the tree virtually invade the inside of the chamber merge the human with the natural. The lack of border potentially might also be used to bridge other apparently distinct realms, such as the natural and the divine. Following McGann’s line of thinking (stripping the religious symbols of their primary meanings), one may state that the dove as the Holy Ghost and the angel holding the lily quite plainly fuse the divine with the natural.



D.G. Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (*The Annunciation*)

The already-mentioned painting *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* depicts the moment of Annunciation, archangel Gabriel’s visit to the Virgin Mary’s room and the appearance of the Holy Ghost symbolised by the dove. Rossetti’s treatment of the theme implies that the event is a drastic point in the young girl’s life. As is specified in the second part of “Mary’s Girlhood,” when “the fullness of time was come” Mary “had no fear at all,”

³⁶ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 173.

³⁷ Swafford, “‘The Fullness of Time’ ...,” p. 80.

yet, “wept till sunshine and felt awed.”³⁸ Rossetti thus questions Mary’s presumed fearlessness immediately after such an implication appears in the work. In addition, he definitely doubts it in the painting: Mary is portrayed as a girl shrinking against the wall, noticeably frightened at the sight of the masterly angel. Here, “bridging the gap between man and god” or “piercing the screen”³⁹ between humanity and divinity seems impossible; the picture reveals rather a violent clash of authorities. Swafford notices in the painting a literal fracture that corresponds to the conflict a vertical line cutting the view in two parts; it is formed by the side of the blue curtain beside the window and the side of the bed.⁴⁰ Interestingly enough, the line is ruptured by the dove and the lily, which perforation might hint at the potential connection between the realms. Still, the portrayal of the Virgin Mary (which seems to prove otherwise) is far more powerful.

Kathryn A. Smith in “The Post-Raphaelite Sources of Pre-Raphaelite Painting” justifies the Virgin’s fear by noting the unconventional portrayal of Gabriel: he is not kneeling before Mary as happens in traditional presentations, but rather personifies a Blakean vision of sanctity.⁴¹ This lack of obeisance to the Virgin is mitigated by the lily in Gabriel’s hand; yet, it is not clear whether he is giving it to her or taking it away. In the latter case, the male visitor’s presence in the Virgin’s room could be understood ambiguously or even profanely: this may be the case if one combines the utter emotional intensity residing in the painting, the lily’s symbolism, the male visitor and the girl’s trauma at and after the “moment.”⁴² The audacious conclusion could be that Mary’s moral development, her “achieving” of chastity ends not at the moment of fulfilment, but of loss. However blasphemous this sounds, such an interpretation could be valid if one takes into consideration Rossetti’s transformative powers, his disbelief, as far as Christian doctrines are concerned and, particularly, his critics’ statements concerning the religiously barren use of symbols in this *double work of art*.

As to the temporal divisions so often used in these Marian works, Rossetti stops time at the moment of Annunciation or, in fact, in the “sunshine” after the specific incident, suggesting that the future of Virgin Mary is not to be discussed, as her “fullness of time was come”; in other words, to use a visual image, the lily-embroidery

³⁸ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 173.

³⁹ Swafford, “‘The Fullness of Time’...,” p. 81.

⁴⁰ Swafford, “‘The Fullness of Time’...,” p. 81.

⁴¹ Kathryn A. Smith, “The Post-Raphaelite Sources of Pre-Raphaelite Painting,” *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, vol. V, no. 2 (1985), p. 48.

⁴² The sexual, rather than a spiritual, character of the encounter is also hinted upon by Tim Barringer. Tim Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 42.

is finished. The poet focuses on the “moment” with all its intensity. Here, a slight difference between the painterly and the poetic comes into view, for while Rossetti seemingly suspends time in the painting,⁴³ in the sonnet, he prolongs it, mentioning the dawn. Still, this visual suspension of time is only apparent, as the temporality of the painting is indeed extended: Rossetti foreshadows Christ’s future in the symbolic details of the thorns and the red cloths prophesying the Passion.⁴⁴

As has been shown, Rossetti’s four Marian works melt into one another and form a single perceptual entity. Bearing in mind their idiosyncrasies as well as the painting-poetry relationship, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* with its two companion sonnets and *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* can be actually classified as a triple – in view of the bilateral relations among the components – or even quadruple work of art, if one takes into account the number of individual elements. Still, what the Rossettian art consists in is the alliance of the two Sister Arts and the interaction between them. Whichever label is applied, the amalgamation of the poetic and the painterly is almost indissoluble in this case: excluding any of the parts makes the overall meaning of the “multiple work of art” incomplete. Certainly, the shares are unequal, but each of them to some extent contributes to the general meaning.

Examining the reciprocal relations among the four works, one gets a coherent example of the Sister Arts’ unison, although it is generated by more than two distinct works. A unified reading of the works leads to general conclusions concerning at least two themes that have reappeared in the present discussion: Rossetti’s handling of temporality and his attitude towards sanctity. As to the former, Rossetti portrays the early life of the Virgin Mary up to the moment of her becoming a divinity, showing both the prior and the present. Still, as I have pointed out, in *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* he suspends time only apparently owing to the use of prefigurative ornaments. This is in line with what George Landow claims in his essay on Rossetti’s temporal structures;⁴⁵ the critic suggests that the poet always wanted to find the meeting point between the earthly and the eternal, or, in Landow’s words, where “time and eternity supposedly interpenetrate.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Beegel, “Rossetti’s Sonnets and Paintings on Mary’s Girlhood...,” p. 2.

⁴⁴ Pearce, *Woman/Image/Text...*, p. 34.

⁴⁵ Landow, ““Life Touching Lips with Immortality’: Rossetti’s Temporal Structures.”

⁴⁶ Landow, ““Life Touching Lips with Immortality’: Rossetti’s Temporal Structures.”

As far as the role of sanctity is concerned, critics discuss not only Rossetti's "bridging the gap between the empirical and the eternal,"⁴⁷ but also that between the divine and the aesthetic or the divine and the human,⁴⁸ concluding that this bridging is not fully realised in the Marian works. Granted that Rossetti does not really manage to integrate humanity and divinity (which has been demonstrated in the case of *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*), he still does make the divine more human, for instance, by portraying Mary unconventionally as a timid, average teenager without a background of long-established ornaments and iconic schemes. Rossetti thus achieves a controversial effect, referred to by Timothy Hilton as "the democratisation of holiness."⁴⁹ This consequence could be partly conditioned by the choice of the model for the Virgin Mary, Dante Gabriel's sister Christina, whose "profane beauty"⁵⁰ helps incarnate the earthly as the divine. Finally, the most discernible phenomenon that unifies the quadruple work is the reappearance of symbols that are used in consistent significations and arranged hierarchically. The crucial ones are explained and occur in all the components of the Marian series; others are mentioned or visualised as ornaments with rudimentary portions of significance.



D.G. Rossetti, *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee*

Analysing *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee*, one has to deal with sharp divisions. The most obvious ones, but most significant too, are the formal partitions both in the drawing and in the poem. The consequential conceptual imbalance

⁴⁷ Swafford, "The Fullness of Time'....," p. 81.

⁴⁸ David H. Riede, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Limits of Victorian Vision* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 42.

⁴⁹ Timothy Hilton, *The Pre-Raphaelites* (New York, Oxford UP, 1970), p. 59. quoted in: Beegel, "Rossetti's Sonnets and Paintings....," p. 4.

⁵⁰ Beegel, "Rossetti's Sonnets and Paintings....," p. 4.

of the picture lies in the split between the world of festivity and the world of holiness; the barrier is formed by the vertical line of the door of Simon's house that Mary Magdalene is trying to enter. Her lover and a woman barring the door are the sentries who represent the forces of worldliness, but they guard not the entrance but the exit: Mary Magdalene is not forbidden to go into the saintly but to leave the worldly. This fact is emphasised in the accompanying sonnet, in which the lover is clearly trying to restrain her from approaching Simon's house:

Nay, not this house, that banquet-house we seek;
See how they kiss and enter; come thou there.
This delicate day of love we two will share
Till at our ear love's whispering night shall speak.
What, sweet one, hold'st thou still the foolish freak?⁵¹

The two worlds compete over Mary Magdalene in dissimilar ways. The festive background of the drawing (amplified by the two worldly figures on the stairs) attacks from behind; the holy occupies the equivocal foreground. The ambiguity of the front layer, according to McGann,⁵² lies mostly in its incongruity, since Christ is certainly not an actual participant in the event and appears only as an icon, in the form of a holy picture on the wall or an apparition in the window.⁵³ Christ's head does not belong to the chamber in Simon's house; there is no trace of his being inside, as the halo around his head covers the background. The other participants' facial expressions convince the viewer that the credibility of Mary Magdalene's vision is dubious, for it seems that she is the only person who can see the image of Christ. This may be the reason why the lover in the poem uses the phrase "foolish freak" to describe the woman's behaviour.

The perspectival inconsistency within the drawing is accompanied in the sonnet by another formal separation: the octave – sestet division. The first part of the work contains words uttered by Magdalene's lover, who is wondering why she is casting roses from her hair and what draws her to the "other" house, and once again, his astonishment emphasises the miraculousness of her vision. The ultimate argument in the lover's words seems to be eroticism, used here as the counterbalance of sanctity: "when I kiss thy feet they'll leave the stair." In the sestet, Mary Magdalene immediately transposes the foot-kissing motif from the realm of pure eroticism to the dominion of Christ: "for His feet my kiss / My hair, my tears He craves to-day." It is Christ who is

⁵¹ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 214.

⁵² McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti...*, pp. 112-113.

⁵³ McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti...*, p. 112.

her bridegroom, not the man holding her back. Therefore, the earthly lover and Christ become rivals, but from the outset, the competition is unfair. The woman clearly takes the side of holiness, and she believes she “is drawn to Him” as he both needs her and loves her. Mary Magdalene feels chosen, and it is not she who needs God’s mercy, but she who is needed as a savior.

What unites the *double work of art* is also the shared dynamism of its elements: in the drawing, Mary Magdalene is shown while “being drawn”⁵⁴ to Christ, and the foreground figures assume charismatic poses. These images correspond to Magdalene’s and the lover’s dramatic utterances in the sonnet, such as: “Oh loose me! [...] let me go!” Nevertheless, a series of elements from the picture differentiates the components of the double work, making the visual part more elaborate than the poetic is. Especially significant are the actions of the figures who are not mentioned in the sonnet. A woman is barring the door with her arm, not allowing Magdalene to go into Simon’s house; the other feasters show amazement on their faces, which attests to the illusory character of Mary’s vision. Yet this astonishment has also another source, as Mary Magdalene is a woman who is famous in the town, and everyone is surprised to see her going into the distinguished house. In this respect, significant also are the disdainful looks and smiles on Simon’s and his servant’s faces.⁵⁵ Only Christ is waiting calmly as if the magnetism affirmed by Magdalene were true.

The incongruities in this *double work of art* serve yet another purpose. As McGann rightly notes, the iconographic, simple portrayal of Christ and the abundant, varied and artistically sophisticated image of the feast reflect the dichotomy between the purely aesthetic vision and the spiritual one.⁵⁶ A similar perspective can be applied to the poem’s separation of the bodily lover’s utterances and Magdalene’s spiritual confession. Consequently, what Rossetti managed to achieve in this particular *double work* is a clash (not merely an opposition) of the saintly and the worldly, accompanied by a disbelief in the possibility of finding any meeting points between the two realms. This does not mean that the conversion of Mary Magdalene is impossible; the work anticipates a future event, Christ’s crucifixion, which is enclosed in the woman’s prophetic words: “What words can tell what other day and place / Shall see me clasp

⁵⁴ McGann points to the meaningful play on the word “draw” which is also present in “Soul’s Beauty;” McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti...*, p. 133.

⁵⁵ D. G. Rossetti described the setting in a July 1865 letter to Mrs. Clapburn, quoted in: Virginia Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1848-1882): A Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), I, p. 62.

⁵⁶ McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti...*, pp. 112-113.

those blood-stained feet of His?”⁵⁷ The set of dichotomies pervading the poem and the drawing can evidently be understood in terms of the traditional body-soul opposition. Still, Rossetti builds here another perspective: he manages to translate the spiritual into the “simple,” “straightforward” and “obvious”; the bodily, on the other hand, becomes “intricate,” “ornamental” and “festive.” In the act of casting roses from her hair, Mary Magdalene is getting rid of the emblems of festivity, struggling to cross the border between the holy and the worldly. Nevertheless, as the lover notices, she is “all a rose”; she entirely (physically) belongs to the festive world. The carnivalesque element is apparent both in the picture and in the poem, and throughout these works, the ascetic is put against the ludic. Additionally, Mary Magdalene’s conversion as the general subject of the works implies spiritual improvement, and a passage from the state of degradation to renewal. Such a treatment of the topic verges on the style of the carnivalesque, what in Bakhtinian terms is referred to as “grotesque realism.”⁵⁸

The viewer is forced to concentrate on the holy in this picture. Despite all of the aesthetic ornaments of the festive background, it is the simple iconographic foreground that draws the viewer’s attention. This happens due to Rossetti’s perspectival trick concerning Christ’s head. The painter focuses neither on the procession nor the feast house (although the central idea of the work was described by Rossetti as “two houses opposite each other”⁵⁹) but on the entrance of Simon’s house; the other house is not even discernible in the drawing (in the sonnet, both places are referred to: “Not this house; the banquet house we seek.”⁶⁰) Nonetheless, considering the contribution of each of the elements of the *double work of art* to its global meaning, the superiority of the drawing over the sonnet is evident. Although each of the poetic images contributes to the *double*’s signification, the picture conveys a wider variety of visual images which are both contributory and external to the joint interpretation of the work.

⁵⁷ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 214.

⁵⁸ S. Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 67.

⁵⁹ Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings...*, p. 62.

⁶⁰ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 214.



D.G. Rossetti, *Troy Town*

An opposite situation – in which the poetic has the advantage over the pictorial – can be identified in another double work entitled “Troy Town.” Significantly enough, the superiority of the poem is not conditioned merely by the fact that Rossetti never actually executed the painting, and the ballad is accompanied only by a design. The drawing renders just a part of a mythological event: Helen is kneeling in a shrine, offering the carved cup to Venus. The picture lacks the presence of Paris, who, although with minimal involvement, does appear in the poem. Still, when one considers Helen’s speech, it is Paris, not Venus, who is the main addressee of Helen’s words. Venus and Cupid are shown in the design, but they lack the significance of their roles that surfaces in the poem. A character’s presence (or the lack of it) in either of the elements of the *double work of art* does not, however, provide a sufficient argument to claim that the poetic work dominates over the drawing. The heart of the matter lies in the choice of the focus.

The ballad also presents the image of Helen kneeling in Venus’ shrine; yet, in the poetic component, Rossetti uses various temporal structures to bring the broader background of the mythical event to the reader’s attention.⁶¹ First of all, the poet refers to the apple-gift which is the primary source of the future destruction of Troy. The time span is thus enormous, but there is also the “now” of the temporal structure: at present, Helen, as the most beautiful woman in the world, exposes herself – literally and figuratively – praying for Paris’ love:

⁶¹ Landow, ““Life Touching Lips with Immortality”: Rossetti’s Temporal Structures.”

“See my breast, how like it is;
(*O Troy Town!*)
See it bare for the air to kiss!
Is the cup to thy heart’s desire?
O for the breast, O make it his!
(*O Troy’s down,*
Tall Troy’s on fire!)

“Yea, for my bosom here I sue;
(*O Troy Town!*)
Thou must give it where ‘tis due,
Give it there to the heart’s desire.
Whom do I give my bosom to?”⁶²

She does give Venus the cup made of her breasts, but, at the same time, she gives her bosom to Paris. The descriptions of Helen’s body instantly highlight her relationship with Paris: the “apple sweet” breasts of “heavenly sheen”⁶³ clearly serve as bait for the man’s desires. Helen’s aim is not to win Venus’ favours but to win Paris’ love with the goddess’ aid. The “now” ends with Venus’ consent to help and Cupid’s sending the arrows of love to Helen’s and Paris’ hearts, which, obviously, anticipates the oncoming tragedy, not marital happiness. The refrain of the poem evokes the destruction of Troy, which event materialises as a result of Helen’s actions. Interestingly enough, in the poem, Rossetti contradicts traditional views: the doom of Trojan civilization is not triggered by negative emotions like jealousy, which conventionally is blamed for the war of Troy, but rather by seemingly positive ones such as love. This inverted interpretation of the myth makes Helen, rather than the envious gods, the initiator of the tragedy. In Landow’s words, Helen’s beauty, her desire and the destruction of Troy are “all but equivalent.”⁶⁴ None of these fatal associations can be perceived in the drawing; it only illustrates the mythical event, without exploring it. However, the visual component of the double shows more sensuality than the poetic one, notwithstanding the detailed descriptions of the human body. In general, Rossetti links history with love and sex in this pair of works, notably alluding to the disastrous aftermath of the love affair in the refrain.

The examples discussed above comprise just a selection of the varied types of parallel relations within Rossetti’s *double works of art*. One can expand this collection with such works as *Aspecta Medusa*, *Bocca Baciata* or *A Day Dream* which also form almost mirroring parallels. In fact, it is hard to classify any more than one of the *double*

⁶² Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 215.

⁶³ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 215.

⁶⁴ Landow, “‘Life Touching Lips with Immortality’: Rossetti’s Temporal Structures.”

works of art into the same category as each of the works forms a separate entity. However, a careful interpreter can find formal similarities between, for instance, *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee* and *Cassandra*, since in both of these doubles, the poetic seems to be subordinate to the visual, which phenomenon was examined above in my discussion of the former work. Likewise, *The Blessed Damozel* can be compared to *Bocca Baciata* or *A Day Dream* on the grounds of their merely illustrative character. The following section, by contrast, concentrates on examples of “disparate pairs” in Rossetti’s work, trying to systematise the nature of disproportion in the pairings.

III. DISPARATE RELATIONS IN THE *DOUBLE WORK OF ART*: EXPLANATIONS, MANUALS AND ADDITIONS

Whereas the previous section presented the *double work of art* in parallel correlation, the current argument introduces a tone of disparity in the Sister Arts’ relationships. In most cases, this disproportion refers to the emergence of the poetic part as an additional, supportive or supplementary factor in the painting’s reading. The very choice of denominations describing this type of poem-painting association is quite rich; the selection varies from simple “interpretation” and “explanation” to “attachment,” “supplement,” “addition” and, finally, “prompt” or “manual.” Certainly, these terms are only apparently synonymous: each implies a different shade of the intricate relations between the arts. Returning to the metaphor of holographic visualisation, the disparate relations would be projected on the imaginary film of the *double work of art* as an area of the core meaning, coming from one source of the laser beam which is invaded by supplementary pieces of information, and with weaker and shredded beams originating in the other source. Rossetti’s never-accomplished work titled *Found* will serve as the opening example.



D.G. Rossetti, *Found*

The painting belongs to the group of Rossetti's projects that can be fully deciphered only after reading their poetic twins. Contemporary commentaries on the work make clear that the woman kneeling against the wall is the approaching farmer's former lover.⁶⁵ Heading towards a marketplace in London at dawn, he meets the woman and discovers her current profession: she is now one of the "fallen women" (*literally* fallen too, as Martin Danahay soberly remarks.⁶⁶) The humiliation that the woman experiences is indicated by the expression on her face, which she is trying to turn away, but this "realistic" occurrence is rendered by Rossetti without any moralising or scorning. On the contrary, considering the vocabulary the poet uses ("resurrection light," "love deflowered," "locked heart"⁶⁷), one is inclined to believe that not only does Rossetti sympathise with the woman but also with the man. This may result from the fact that, as Danahay notes, in his depictions of prostitutes, Rossetti represents male characters in a positive light;⁶⁸ in "Jenny," another poem on the same theme, the male speaker is concerned about the fallen woman's disgraceful condition and sympathises

⁶⁵ William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti as Designer and Writer* (London: Cassell, 1889), p. 18; Frederic George Stephens, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Seeley, 1894), p. 38.

⁶⁶ Martin A. Danahay, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Virtual Bodies," *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 36, no. 4 (1998), 5 September 2000. <<http://vp.engl.wvu.edu/Winter98/danahay.htm>>.

⁶⁷ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 233.

⁶⁸ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 233.

with her. In *Found*, the rescuer from the “unspoilt” world also shows his concern about the woman’s situation while the breaking dawn symbolises hope for the woman’s “resurrection” and for the man’s forgiveness.

The rich symbolism of the painting is only partially reflected in the poetic component. While the above-mentioned “resurrection light” appears as both a visual and a verbal image, the accessory symbol of the calf relates to the painting only, and it is not even alluded to in the sonnet. The calf, which is wrapped in the net and tied to the cart, not only recalls the woman’s past life but also foregrounds the future: the animal is probably being brought to the slaughter, or it is going to be sold. Whatever the case may be, there is some correlation between the beast’s and the girl’s fates; yet at first glance, it is not clear whether Rossetti differentiates the two creatures’ destinies or equates them. Danahay presents a thorough analysis of the calf-symbol: he identifies selling a calf with prostitution as in both situations one deals with the economic exchange of “flesh” for money in a market.⁶⁹ Another interpretation of the seemingly unattached symbol is attempted by Hallman B. Bryant, who suggests that the net wrapping the calf stands for the life the woman would have had if she had not left the lover: the life of marital entanglement.⁷⁰

The functions of the bridge, another important image that can potentially convey symbolic meanings, are different with respect to the reading of the double as it is present in both components. The symbolism of the bridge surfaces as a contributory factor in any interpretation of the *double work of art* which concerns moral issues. The farmer has just come over from the other side, the “pure” life that preceded the woman’s “fall.” A question that arises is whether she is capable of crossing the symbolic bridge to return to her previous life. Victorian moralists would certainly have denied that; once she becomes “fallen,” there is no possibility of converting. That is to say, the road leading across the river is a one-way street. Alternatively, the significance of the symbol could be more dramatic: Danahay points to the fact that the bridge may serve as a means to end the woman’s disgraceful life.⁷¹

A specific feature of the sonnet “Found” is the speaker’s position as an onlooker who is observing the pictured scene, and not the painting. Therefore, the verbal account resembles a factual, newspaper report written on the spot; it is a poetic description

⁶⁹ Danahay, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Virtual Bodies.”

⁷⁰ Hallman B. Bryant, “Two Unfinished Pre-Raphaelite Paintings: D.G. Rossetti’s *Found* and Ford Madox Brown’s *Take Your Son, Sir!*” *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, vol. III, no. 1 (1982), p. 60.

⁷¹ Danahay, footnotes to “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Virtual Bodies.”

delivered in a simple manner. In the octet, the speaker describes the scene with an array of metaphorical distinctions between day and night as well as between light and darkness:

“There is a budding morrow in midnight:” –
So sang our Keats, our English nightingale.
And here, as lamps across the bridge turn pale
In London’s smokeless resurrection-light,
Dark breaks to dawn. But o’er the deadly blight
Of Love deflowered and sorrow of none avail,
Which makes this man gasp and this woman quail,
Can day from darkness ever again take flight?⁷²

The same contrasts of brightness come into view in the painting, which appears to be a realistic, photographic shot of the scene, but it also depicts the “smokeless resurrection light” and the “budding morrow” in the background. What the poem mainly contributes to the overall understanding of the *double work of art* is the speaker’s moment of reflection concerning the future (“Can day from darkness ever again take flight?” and: “what part can life now take?”⁷³), alluded to in the painting by the calf-symbol and supported by the motto taken from Keats. Obviously, the melodramatic cry of the woman at the end of the sonnet – “Leave me – I do not know you – go away!”⁷⁴ – is not a definite solution of these dilemmas.

To claim that Rossetti rebelled against Victorian morality is somewhat risky in the context of this particular pair of works. The questions about the future asked by Rossetti in the sonnet, as well as the citation from Keats (“There is a budding morrow in midnight”⁷⁵) which Rossetti uses at the beginning, seem to establish his attitude towards the miserable woman, showing hope, mercy and compassion. However, Rossetti neither makes it clear enough whether he agrees with Keats’ uplifting remark, nor does he complete the enquiries he has launched. The only conclusion is the familiar one: the artist sometimes stays as ambiguous in his convictions as the women from his paintings do in their moral portrayals.

⁷² Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 233.

⁷³ Danahay, footnotes to “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Virtual Bodies.”

⁷⁴ Danahay, footnotes to “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Virtual Bodies.”

⁷⁵ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 233.



D.G. Rossetti, *Venus Verticordia*

Rossetti's painting titled *Venus Verticordia* and its poetic counterpart abound in ambiguities; it is hard, however, to notice any of them, contemplating only the visual part. The image of the woman, "a large woman, almost a giantess,"⁷⁶ represents the mythical goddess of beauty; yet, formally, she can also be regarded as the typical "Rossetti Woman" who is neither an ideal beauty nor its divine personification. William Sharp comments on the fact in the following way: "The Venus of this picture is no Aphrodite, fresh and white and jubilant from the foam of Idalian seas, nor is she Love incarnate or human passion; but she is a queen of Love who loves not herself, a desire that is unsatiable and remorseless, absolute, supreme."⁷⁷ Not until one reads the poetic equivalent does one realise the ambiguities of the *double work of art*; only then the signification of the title begins to matter: *Verticordia* means "the turner of the hearts,"⁷⁸ which implies that the woman's beauty is accompanied by the power of influence. Traditionally, her might is connected with turning the hearts of women from illicit love,⁷⁹ but according to McGann, Rossetti makes the goddess turn hearts towards the indulgence of the senses.⁸⁰ These two opposite connotations designate one of the most

⁷⁶ Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings...*, p. 99.

⁷⁷ William Sharp, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Record and a Study* (London: Macmillan, 1882), p. 206.

⁷⁸ Paul Franklin Baum, ed. *Poems, Ballads and Sonnets. By Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New York: Doubleday Doran, 1937), p. 172.

⁷⁹ Baum, *Poems...*, p. 172.

⁸⁰ McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti...*, pp. 121-123.

crucial ambiguities of the work, that referring to the moral value of art. In defense of Rossetti's equivocal but novel treatment of the theme, McGann states the following: "Moral redemption of physical love can be realised and understood when sensuous beauty comes to us in forms of art."⁸¹ This interaction of physical beauty, morality and art lies at the heart of the *double work of art*.

The "understanding" of physical love as sensuous beauty was troublesome for Rossetti. His prudish clients would not accept any nudity in artworks,⁸² so *Venus* was rejected by the painter's patron. Therefore, Rossetti moderates his erotic challenge in the painting, bashfully hiding Venus' body and portraying her with only one naked breast that only subtly indicates corporeal beauty. In the accompanying poem, Rossetti successfully turns the reader's attention from the moral aspect of love towards the artistic realm:

She hath the apple in her hand for thee,
Yet almost in her heart would hold it back;
She muses, with her eyes upon the track
Of that which in thy spirit they can see.
Haply, 'Behold, he is at peace,' saith she;
'Alas! the apple for his lips,—the dart
That follows its brief sweetness to his heart,—
The wandering of his feet perpetually!'

A little space her glance is still and coy;
But if she give the fruit that works her spell,
Those eyes shall flame as for her Phrygian boy.
Then shall her bird's strained throat the woe foretell,
And her far seas moan as a single shell,
And through her dark grove strike the light of Troy.⁸³

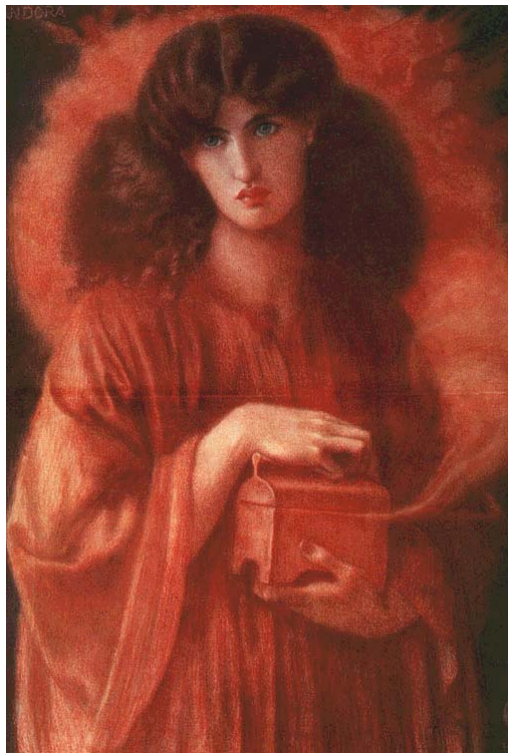
Rossetti creates here a context for the visual image, referring to history, culture and art in general. Such a poetic amplification of the visual image may be seen as a justification of the use of the sensuous in painting and a remedy for Rossetti's fears as far as the work's reception is concerned. The reference to great cultural disasters in the poem easily diverts the percipient's attention from the corporeal aspects of beauty, making them insignificant. In this way a painting superficially classified as a female nude gains the status of a myth-based visual metaphor.

⁸¹ "Venus Verticordia: Commentary," *The Rossetti Archive*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, August 2001, <<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s173.rap.html>>.

⁸² H. C. Marrilier, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Illustrated Memorial of his Life and Art* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1899), p. 135.

⁸³ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 210.

The attributes furnishing the picture add some more haziness to the overall vision, including the dart “which follows its brief sweetness to his heart”⁸⁴ and the apple, which has a double meaning. It can be perceived either as the apple of discord, the one Paris gave to Venus as the symbol of supreme beauty, or the Biblical apple from the Tree of Knowledge.⁸⁵ The two associations are not as distant as they may seem. In both symbolic uses, the apple is a prophetic sign of disaster: the Trojan War and the Fall of Man, respectively. Consequently, Rossetti concludes with a deeply pessimistic vision of the world in which the positive leads to the extremely disastrous; the image of “the love-lit fires of Troy”⁸⁶ mentioned in the last line leaves the reader no doubt as to the source of the calamity.



D.G. Rossetti, *Pandora*

In *Venus Verticordia*, it is the poetic component of the *double work of art* that carries the most essential meanings. The ambiguities discussed above find their elaborations in the poem, being only hinted at in the painting. The same kind of relationship emerges in *Pandora*: here also the poem surpasses the painting in terms of

⁸⁴ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 210.

⁸⁵ McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti...*, p. 122.

⁸⁶ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 210.

the revelation of meanings. Pandora, like Venus, is a figure occupied with disastrous insights into the future:

What of the end, Pandora? Was it thine,
The deed that set these fiery pinions free?
Ah! wherefore did the Olympian consistory
In its own likeness make thee half divine?
Was it that Juno's brow might stand a sign
For ever? and the mien of Pallas be
A deadly thing? and that all men might see
In Venus' eyes the gaze of Proserpine?

What of the end? These beat their wings at will,
The ill-born things, the good things turned to ill,—
Powers of the impassioned hours prohibited.
Aye, clench the casket now! Whither they go
Thou mayst not dare to think: nor canst thou know
If Hope still pent there be alive or dead.⁸⁷

The sonnet comprises of a set of questions to Pandora. First, Rossetti enquires, rhetorically, who was responsible for freeing the evils; next, he wonders why the gods of Olympus, considering the answer to the first question, made Pandora half-divine. Finally, the last question concerns the character's ability to combine the qualities of Juno, Athena and Venus; three goddesses are "all summoned up in Pandora, a deadly beauty,"⁸⁸ as David G. Riede remarks. The crucial inquiry, however, develops in the sestet, and it pertains to Pandora's unawareness of the consequences of her deed, since the variety of evils reaches regions of experience that Pandora cannot imagine. Rossetti frequently combines female beauty with ultimate wickedness; in this particular painting, the image of the beautiful woman is being wrapped up in the reddish smoke that visualises the evils. Once again he ponders the interaction of artistic beauty and the power of artistic creation in relation to knowledge.⁸⁹ These notions, however, are not the most intriguing ones in this *double work of art*. The crux is how Rossetti did *not* manage to interweave the two components of the Sister Arts. It is unavoidable to label the painting as an illustration of the sonnet, but it is also improper, because, as with most of his doubles, the painting chronologically preceded the poem.

In the case of *Pandora*, the disparate relation reaches its peak: there exists a deep discrepancy between the halves of the *double work of art* in respect of the significance

⁸⁷ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 211.

⁸⁸ David G. Riede, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti Revisited* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), p. 159.

⁸⁹ McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti...*, pp. 121-122.

that individual images convey. First, Rossetti naïvely portrays the evils as reddish smoke, literally emerging from the casket. Formal literality, according to McGann, is Rossetti's conscious method,⁹⁰ but this particular portrayal rather reminds the viewer of an illustration from a children's book. Secondly, as Marillier suggests in his commentary, the expression on Pandora's face is totally irrelevant not only to our expectations (which is neither unusual in Rossetti's art, nor is it required), but mainly to the dramatic situation in the poetic counterpart.⁹¹ Marillier asserts that Pandora presents a melancholic look rather than an expression of surprise or grief;⁹² the indifference emerging from the painting and the accusatory tone of the poem constitute the major inconsistency in the *double work of art*. The painting conveys a pitiful image of the half-goddess – she reflects on the lost decency of the world, holding on to the Hope that is left in the casket – whereas the sonnet accuses her of freeing the evils. Consequently, Rossetti makes Pandora guilty although originally the damage was done by Epimetheus.⁹³ This idiosyncratic, remade version of the myth contradicts the conventional interpretations in which Pandora serves only as a means of annihilation; such an instrumental role for the character seems to be implied only in the painting.

Generally, Rossetti presents a completely altered vision of Pandora in each of the double's components. In other words, the minimal integration of the *double work of art* lies in a certain reallocation of the target of artistic expression: the poetic version of the mythological character's actions is largely inconsistent with the painterly portrayal. The gap between the poetic and the pictorial is usually wider the fewer "significant details" there are in the visual component. In *Pandora*, Rossetti decided not to include many particulars; basically, there is no accessory symbolism in the painting outside the realm of the main figure. This fact can serve as another point on the list of differences between the painting and the poem: the latter is quite rich in symbolism. Overall, Rossetti's conception in this *double work of art* is highly incoherent, and as a consequence, the word-image relationship between its components is diminished.

⁹⁰ McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti...*, p. 90.

⁹¹ Marillier, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti...*, p. 163.

⁹² Marillier, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti...*, p. 163.

⁹³ Jan Parandowski, *Mitologia* [Mythology] (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1990), p. 47.



D.G. Rossetti, *Lady Lilith*

The painting *Lady Lilith* and its two poetic counterparts “Body’s Beauty” (“Lilith”) and “Eden Bower” are usually analysed in the context of the equivocal origin of the main figure in Rossetti’s representations. Remarkably, the works often serve as targets of gender criticism which, in this case, focuses mainly on the source. According to Talmudic legends, Lilith was Adam’s first wife, a demonic creature who, refusing to submit herself to Adam, deserved ejection from Eden.⁹⁴ After the expulsion from Paradise, for which Adam blamed Eve, Lilith and Adam reunited for a time, and they conceived demon-children. Disappointed with Adam and Eve’s reconciliation, Lilith assumed the Queenship of Demons, and since then she is believed to kill babies in the first days of their lives. In addition, she still bears children herself, “being impregnated by the semen produced by masturbation and nocturnal emissions.”⁹⁵ Lilith’s refusal to comply with Adam’s demand is, presumably, the first feminist act in history;⁹⁶ therefore, both the legend itself and Rossetti’s adaptations have long served as objects of gender-based interpretations.

Rossetti’s approach to the theme is original and ambiguous at the same time. The artist himself claimed that the visual portrayal of the woman is “modernised,”⁹⁷ and indeed, it is modern, contemporary to Victorian times. The first level of the

⁹⁴ David Stern and Mark J. Mirsky, *Rabbinic Fantasies: Imaginative Narratives from Classical Hebrew Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 167-168, 183-184.

⁹⁵ Jeffrey Smith, “Lilit, Malkah ha-Shadim,” *The Lilith Shrine*, Nov. 1997, May 2001, <<http://www.lilitu.com/lilith/lilit.html>>.

⁹⁶ Smith, “Lilit, Malkah ha-Shadim.”

⁹⁷ William Michael Rossetti, ed. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters, with a Memoir* (London: Ellis and Elvey, 1895), p. 850.

transformation consists in categorising Lilith as an archetypal *femme fatale*.⁹⁸ In “Body’s Beauty,” Rossetti portrays the woman as a witch who is weaving a bright net of desire to entangle men, destroying their hearts and bodies:

Of Adam’s first wife, Lilith, it is told
(The witch he loved before the gift of Eve,)
 That, ere the snake’s, her sweet tongue could de-
ceive,
And her enchanted hair was the first gold.
And still she sits, young while the earth is old,
And, subtly of herself contemplative,
Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave,
Till heart and body and life are in its hold.

The rose and poppy are her flowers; for where
Is he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent
And soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare?
Lo! as that youth’s eyes burned at thine, so went
Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck bent
And round his heart one strangling golden hair.⁹⁹

As a self-sufficient, independent woman, she is “of herself contemplative” and only “draws”¹⁰⁰ men to subsequently enchant them. This image is exactly paralleled in the painting: the lady is combing her hair and looking in the mirror with evident satisfaction. Her “enchanted hair”¹⁰¹ is her main tool of destruction as it is used for strangling – an image Rossetti got from Goethe.¹⁰² In addition, the “bright web”¹⁰³ can, in fact, be made of her hair, although critics have not specifically noticed the fact. Consequently, the process of combing can be read as a sophisticated preparation or premeditation before inflicting pain. The hair is a strong image here, for on the one hand, Rossetti uses it in the poem as a castrating tool,¹⁰⁴ and on the other, hair constitutes a powerful sexual symbol common in the artist’s portrayals of women.

The *double work of art* develops when one considers its other poetic component, “Eden Bower.” In this ballad, Lilith is given the leading voice; she herself relates the story.¹⁰⁵ Rossetti focuses on the part of the Hebraic legend in which Lilith, still in

⁹⁸ Robert D. Johnston, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969), p. 119.

⁹⁹ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 100.

¹⁰⁰ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 100.

¹⁰¹ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 100.

¹⁰² “Body’s Beauty: Literary,” *The Rossetti Archive*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, August 2001, <<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/2-1867.s205.raw.html>>

¹⁰³ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 100.

¹⁰⁴ J.B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 130.

¹⁰⁵ Ronnalie Roper Howard, *The Dark Glass: Vision and Technique in the Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1972), p. 148.

human shape, seduces the serpent to subsequently take his body and tempt Eve.¹⁰⁶ The incident becomes a highly eroticised image in Rossetti's rendering: claiming to have been "the snake in Eden,"¹⁰⁷ Lilith openly craves the serpent's body, urging him to become the "lover of Lilith."¹⁰⁸ The imagery Rossetti uses to describe the woman's actions is quite striking and unequivocal:

Then bring thou close thine head till it glisten
Along my breast, and lip me and listen. [...]

Then ope thine ear to my warm mouth's cooing
And learn what deed remains for our doing. [...]

In thy sweet folds bind me and bend me,
And let me feel the shape thou shalt lend me.¹⁰⁹

When one employs feminist doctrines and recognises the snake-imagery of the poem as deeply erotic and the creature itself as a phallic symbol, the outcome is even more shocking.

Lilith's relation to Adam and Eve grows to be the rationale behind her deeds; she acts as a typical ex-wife, craving revenge:

"In thy shape I'll go back to Eden;
(*Alas the hour!*)
In these coils that Tree will I grapple,
And stretch this crowned head forth by the apple.
"Lo, Eve bends to the breath of Lilith!
(*Sing Eden Bower!*)
O how then shall my heart desire
All her blood as food to its fire!"¹¹⁰

The vampiric image shows Lilith's determination to take revenge on Eve, Adam and, consequently, the whole of humanity; her intentions are combined with prophetic insights into the future: "To Eve's womb, from our sweet to-morrow, / God shall greatly multiply sorrow."¹¹¹ As a typical abandoned woman, Lilith recalls her past life with Adam, without omitting the most intimate episodes:

"What great joys had Adam and Lilith!--
(*Alas the hour!*)

¹⁰⁶ Riede, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti Revisited*, p. 97.

¹⁰⁷ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 109.

¹⁰⁸ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 110.

¹⁰⁹ Rossetti, *The Works*, pp. 109-113.

¹¹⁰ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 111.

¹¹¹ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 113.

Sweet close rings of the serpent's twining,
As heart in heart lay sighing and pining.¹¹²

The hurt pride of a woman lies at the heart of the revenge which Lilith accomplishes, taking extreme measures: she makes a pact with Satan. Motivated by marital disappointment, she transforms into the instigator of the ultimate evil, the Fall of Man. However, Rossetti does not moralise, nor does he judge Lilith; he only ponders how “love grows hate in the heart of a woman.”¹¹³

Critics like Robert D. Johnston and Rodolphe Louis Megroz complain about Rossetti's inability to decide whether to portray Lilith as a demoniac or an erotic personality.¹¹⁴ Amy Scerba in *Changing Literary Representations of Lilith* accurately states that the poet does not choose, he “forges them [the depictions] together into one terrifyingly erotic theme.”¹¹⁵ Indeed, Lilith as a fusion of malevolence and eroticism is Rossetti's own invention.¹¹⁶ Still, the synthesis works only in poetry, mainly in “Eden Bower”; it is not that obvious in “Body's Beauty” although the sonnet contains such images as a rose, symbol of physical love, associated with a poppy that denotes sleep or death. A juxtaposition of erotic love and aversion appears also in the portrayal of the youth's (Adam's) “eyes burning” at Lilith, which image implies desire but also anger. Even if one treats desire as a positive emotion, it leads here to disaster, leaving Adam with “his straight neck bent,”¹¹⁷ which, considered from another perspective, raises castration associations.¹¹⁸ Hence, it could be argued that overall, the emphasis in the sonnet falls not on the erotic but rather on the evil and fatal. Consequently, Rossetti splits the fusion of the erotic and the evil in this *double work of art*; he, as it were, breaks the famous phrase “*femme fatale*” in two. In “Body's Beauty,” stress is laid on the *fatale* while the other part of the term is accentuated in the painting *Lady Lilith*.

A separate analysis of the painting, independent of the poetic supplements, does not conclude with any indication of Lilith's iniquity. Marrilier's description of the work corroborates the assumption:

¹¹² Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 109.

¹¹³ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 110.

¹¹⁴ Johnston, p. 120; Rodolphe Louis Megroz, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter Poet of Heaven in Earth* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 189.

¹¹⁵ *Changing Literary Representations of Lilith and the Evolution of a Mythical Heroine*, ed. Amy Scerba, May 2001, <<http://eserver.org/feminism/lilith/index.html>>.

¹¹⁶ John Masefield, *Thanks Before Going: Notes on Some of the Original Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New York: The Macmillan Group, 1947), p. 60.

¹¹⁷ Rossetti, *The Works*, p. 100.

¹¹⁸ *Changing Literary Representations of Lilith and the Evolution of a Mythical Heroine*, ed. Amy Scerba.

Lilith is a modernized conception of that wife whom Adam had before Eve, in the Talmudic legend, and by whom “he begat nothing but diuils.” She is the incarnation of the world and the flesh, with all sorts of latent suggestions of the third element. A beautiful woman, splendidly and voluptuously formed, is leaning back on a couch combing her long fair hair, while with cold dispassionateness she surveys her features in a hand mirror. She is not only the Lilith of Adam, the Lilith who in “Eden Bower” makes that weird compact with the serpent, but the Lilith of all time; lovely but loveless, amorous and deadly. She herself was a serpent first, and knows the gift of fascination. Bowered in roses, robed in white flowing draperies that slip and reveal the swelling contour of her bust and shoulders, no painter has ever idealized like this the elemental power of carnal loveliness.¹¹⁹

The critic admits that Lilith “was a serpent herself,” but he could not have based this statement on a study of the picture in which the major motif is “carnal loveliness”; the knowledge of Lilith’s story comes from an external source. Jan Marsh also stresses the purely physical aspect of beauty in this painting and remarks that Lilith’s clothes look as if they were ready to be taken off.¹²⁰ The “body’s beauty,” to use Rossetti’s term, is not in the least of a demonic kind; it is deeply erotic, “sexually selfish,”¹²¹ but nothing in its demeanour suggests malicious associations. An additional piece of evidence comes from the famous mirror, a detail which, being situated behind the figure, reflects the observer’s world, possibly a garden. Yet, critics argue whether it is indeed a mirror or a window;¹²² if the latter is the case, the perspective of interpretation changes, as a window would reveal Lilith’s background rather than the observer’s. McGann tries to resolve the controversy, stating that the mirror “functions [...] as a window,”¹²³ which assertion actually confuses the issue even further since it confuses the possible perspectives in which the painting could be read.

The word “lady” in the title of the painting entails an unorthodox approach towards the theme of Lilith: the designation implies a transformed cultural setting and a changed set of references connected with the mythological figure. Rossetti lets the bodily, “fleshly” element prevail in the portrayal; nevertheless, in this purely aesthetic treatment, Rossetti strips Lilith of her feminist qualities instead of, as Amy Scerba claims, opening the theme to new interpretations.¹²⁴ This, of course, does not mean that

¹¹⁹ Marillier, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti...*, pp. 132-133.

¹²⁰ Jan Marsh, *The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), p. 235.

¹²¹ Jane M. Ussher, *Fantasies of Femininity: Reframing the Boundaries of Sex* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), p. 96.

¹²² Marillier claims it is a window whereas Stephens opts for a mirror reflecting a garden Marillier, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti...*, p. 132. Stephens, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, p. 69.

¹²³ McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti ...*, p. 18.

¹²⁴ *Changing Literary Representations of Lilith and the Evolution of a Mythical Heroine*, ed. Amy Scerba.

the painting is worthless to interpreters except for its apparent eroticism. The interpretative appeal of *Lady Lilith* consists in the abundance of “significant details” like the wreath on Lilith’s knees and the red ribbon on her wrist, emblems which often pass unnoticed in Rossetti criticism. Equally significant is the candelabrum beside the mirror/window. A combination of all the symbolic details of the setting suggests that Lilith has been translocated to the Victorian realm.¹²⁵ As Bullen maintains, she does not lose her power in this new incarnation: “She has stepped out of the past and into the nineteenth century. She is to be found in the modern upper-class Victorian boudoir or bedroom, and is as potent an influence over the nineteenth-century male mind as she was over the ancient male mind.”¹²⁶ Who is the nineteenth-century Lilith? In the renowned “Madonna-Whore” opposition her status seems to be clear.

This analysis clearly shows that if treated as a “triple” work of art, the Lilith story does not form a coherent unity. The main point of disagreement, quite typically, lies between the poetic and the visual. Whereas the sonnet and the ballad present a roughly consistent view of the theme, the painting differs considerably. The dissimilarity arises due to the fact that the visual component lacks an important element: the ingredient of evil in Lilith’s portrayal. Therefore, the painting cannot even be called a mere illustration of the poems; it is rather a parallel but autonomous reflection on the same source.

It has been demonstrated in the above argument that in this type of relations in Rossetti’s *double work of art*, one of its components (in most cases, the painting) carries what I have called the “core meaning.” The other constituent does not affect this principal signification but rather expands it extensively; the accompanying poem provides a larger context or offers clues to the reading of the painting, as in the case of *Venus Verticordia*. In *Found*, the visual when combined with the poetic becomes more comprehensible (or even comprehensible at all). The most extreme cases of the disparate relations in *the double work of art* are found in *Pandora* and in the works concerning Lilith. In both pairings, Rossetti chooses dissimilar directions when interpreting the myths poetically and visually; this kind of disparity results in the major incoherence of meaning. Generally, in most of the disparate relationships, one deals with poetic elaborations of the pictorial visions, more sophisticated and semantically more complex

¹²⁵ Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body*, p. 136.

¹²⁶ Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body*, p. 136.

than, for instance, the straightforward elucidation of emblems in the sonnet accompanying *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*.

* * *

This limited selection of Rossetti's *double works of art* does not encompass all the possible combinations of "word and image" concerning this phenomenon. Regardless of the formal divisions and sub-divisions which have been introduced in this chapter, in conclusion, I would like to attempt a more general description of the semantic nature of the *double work of art*. Obviously, the framework of the current argument should be treated in figurative (or even technical) terms: one cannot really *estimate* the "amount of information" originating from each of the constituents of a *double work of art*; neither is it possible, nor necessary, to identify the "core meaning" and its source. The essential thing is the *conjoint* reading of the double. However, one has to recognise the fact that Rossetti always looks for the Blakean "contrary" of any quality he represents. He acts dialogically, desiring counterarguments: beauty does not exist without ugliness, moral decency without corruption, love without hatred. This balanced treatment of material does not, obviously, appear in completely juxtaposed realms: fusions are unavoidable. In point of fact, these fusions, these blurred lines, constitute the essence of Rossetti's art, which, in this context, can be encapsulated within a comment from Merleau-Ponty: "When through the water's thickness I see the tiled bottom of the pool, I do not see it *despite* the water and the reflections; I see it through them and because of them."¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," p. 142.

CHAPTER 3: SPECTATORSHIP AND TEMPORALITY IN DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI'S *SONNETS FOR PICTURES*¹

The following chapter shows the functioning of the process of transformation from the painterly to the poetic in selected examples of D. G. Rossetti's *Sonnets for Pictures*, a set of poems written under the inspiration of paintings created by, for instance, Memling, Mantegna, Ingres and Giorgione. Verse descriptions of painting belong to the wide-ranging ekphrastic tradition; Rossetti, however, seems to develop a more critical approach to the convention of reflecting the visual arts in the verbal form, trying to establish a complex relationship between the poetic text and its source-painting. Rossetti's sonnets are neither descriptions nor mere elucidations of visual images, but they rather deserve a status of composite transformations which are analysed in the context of spectatorship and temporality, with the reservation that these are only two of many possible approaches. The complex character of the process of transformation from the visual to the verbal is, thus, discussed in the following argument from the perspective of the acts of looking and the temporal structures produced in the depicted scenes. Accordingly, the complexity of painting – poetry conversion, in this case, involves the questions of agency as well as focalisation and chronology in interpretations of both visual and literary texts; as it will be demonstrated, an analysis concerning such issues reveals major ambiguities and tensions at the border between the arts.



Andrea Mantegna, *Parnassus*

¹ An altered version of the chapter was published as: "Images into Words: Spectatorship and Temporality in D. G. Rossetti's Poetic Transformations of Painting," in *Idea przemiany w kulturze, literaturze, języku i edukacji*, eds. P. Fast, P. Janikowski (Częstochowa: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Lingwistycznej, 2007), pp. 147-155.

In the opening of the sonnet on Andrea Mantegna's painting *Parnassus*, Rossetti verbalizes an uncertainty: "Scarcely, I think; yet it indeed *may* be / The meaning reached him," and intensifies it by the ambiguities of the wordplays introduced in the subsequent sections of the work. The first, commonly recognized one rests on the word "frame" which can be considered here in two basic meanings: as the physical border of a painting and as referring to human body:²

Scarcely, I think; yet it indeed *may* be
The meaning reached him, when this music rang
Clear through his frame, a sweet possessive pang,
And he beheld these rocks and that ridged sea.³

Another possible denotation attached to the word is a meaning associating the "frame" with the structure of Apollo's instrument, the lyre. Reading the quoted lines once again, one immediately replaces "him" – at first potentially referring to Mantegna himself⁴ – with an allusion to Apollo, a little figure situated at the left side of the painting. What is more, this connotation grows to become the primary meaning of "frame" as it is music that "rings through his frame;" only then, the sound may transform itself into a painterly image and, subsequently, "ring through" Mantegna's body, as Jerome McGann puts it.⁵ Therefore, the figural relation between "Rossetti" and "Mantegna," that McGann alludes to, is no longer so obvious.⁶ The painter creates a musical image of an allegorical dance, thus making the music 'visible' to the viewer and emphasising, simultaneously, the role of the player – the creator of the music. The "clearness" of the sound is visualised in the nymphs' dance moves; the impression the music makes is, however, added by Rossetti who describes it as "the sweet possessive pang."⁷ Consequently, Rossetti too manages to make the music heard – with the use of verbal means.

The initial uncertainty, nevertheless, refers also to the concept of "meaning." The primary question is the following: is it Mantegna's inability to express or even to formulate the "idea" of his painting or his unawareness of the signification of the scene he painted that troubles Rossetti so much? Certainly, the poet is bothered by

² Jerome J. McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Game that Must be Lost* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 23.

³ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. William Michael Rossetti (London: Ellis, 1911), p. 188.

⁴ McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti...*, p. 23.

⁵ McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti...*, p. 23.

⁶ McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti...*, pp. 23-4.

⁷ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 188.

the interpretive ambiguities connected with the allegorical dance, which he indicated in a footnote to the first publication of the sonnet: “this picture would appear to have been in the artist’s mind an allegory, which the modern spectator may seek vainly to interpret.”⁸ Another question is the following: which of the components of the picture serves as the main idea in the perception of the visual whole? The first theme presents the dance of nine nymphs who, according to the myth, cause volcanic eruption that can only be tamed by Pegasus (who is present in the right-hand section of the painting). The second sub-topic concerns Mars and Venus (situated in the upper section), the illegitimate lovers, who are being chased by the cuckolded husband, Vulcan (entering the scene from the right). Their love affair is protected by Mercury (standing beside Pegasus) and Apollo whose music forms yet another focal point of the allegory.⁹

Assuming that the poem concentrates on Apollo, it is *his* perspective that Rossetti puts in the foreground and ponders on; the reference to the “meaning” is, in this case, completely internal, “in-the-picture”: the reader/viewer is confronted with Apollo’s lack of comprehension. The god, in his imperfection, connects to the viewer because, as any “modern spectator” would, he beholds the rocks and the sea in the background, overlooking the scene taking place in front of him. He completely ignores the beauties, disregarding the sensual pleasures of their presence; his eyes are stuck to the “blind fixedness of thought.”¹⁰ Rossetti, in his judgement: “It is bitter glad / Even unto tears,”¹¹ pities Apollo’s choice to “know” the dancers intellectually instead of “feeling” them sensually. Such a reading proves Rossetti’s total omission of the mythical “meaning” of the scene; the poet only manages to localise it – in the heart or in the mind – which is ultimately achieved in the last lines of the sonnet: “The heart’s each pulse shall keep the sense it had / With all, though the mind’s labour run to nought.”¹²

In the words: “Yet it indeed *may* be / The meaning reached him,” the intellectual signification reaches Apollo, depriving him of the sensual seeing of an act in which any “meaning” is to be ignored. The “sense” filling the painting is “A

⁸ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, “A Dance of Nymphs, by Andrea Mantegna; in the Louvre,” *The Germ*, No 4 (1850), p. 181.

⁹ Emil Kren and Daniel Marx, “Parnassus,” *Web Gallery of Art*, Feb. 2002, <<http://www.kfki.hu/~arthp/html/m/mantegna/2/parnassu.html>>.

¹⁰ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 189.

¹¹ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 189.

¹² Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 189.

secret of the wells of Life,” and it lies in “The heart’s each pulse”; this ambivalent explanation brings confusion: “sense” has both mental and sensual connotations; it can refer to both the “sensible” and the “sensual.” Rossetti elaborates on the ambiguity of the double meaning throughout the sonnet, combining the images of sensual perception – the sound of music, the act of looking at the rocks and the women’s hair touching Apollo’s face – with the phrases indicating reasonable thinking and knowledge, such as the “fixedness of thought” or “wit.” The traditional human duality – “the mind” versus “the heart,” to use the poet’s terms – collapses after realising the double signification of the Rossettian “sense”; the equivocal meaning of the word is incorporated in an act of artistic expression that, in turn, is to be experienced by perception, not by mere seeing, or by what Merlau-Ponty in *Eye and Mind* calls “vision”:

There is the vision upon which I reflect; I cannot think it except *as* thought, the mind’s inspection, judgement, a reading of signs. And there is the vision that actually occurs, an honorary or established thought, collapsed into a body-its own body, of which we can have no idea except in the exercise of it, and which introduces, between space and thought, the autonomous order of the composite of soul and body. The enigma of vision is not done away with; it is shifted from the “thought of seeing” to vision in act.¹³

Rossetti is aware of the cognitive power of a painterly image and believes in its idiosyncratic character; moreover, as a poet who draws inspiration from painting, he always stresses the viewer’s interpretive abilities. Therefore, Rossetti does not try to see the painted scene through the author’s eyes. John Dixon Hunt maintains that “Mantegna’s meaning *fills* the image” and right afterwards notices that Rossetti’s sonnet functions as simultaneous, not sequential meditation.¹⁴ Rossetti interprets the scene disjointly, but he does not look for the painter’s meaning; he creates his own idiosyncratic reading of the experience, placing his reader at the same level as the viewer occupies. The distinctness of the two authorial perspectives is substantiated by the poet’s overlooking the themes that are central to the painter: the relationship of Mars and Venus as well as Pegasus’ and Mercury’s involvement in the dancing scene.

¹³ Maurice Merleau Ponty, *Primacy of Perception* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 175.

¹⁴ John Dixon Hunt, “A Moment’s Monument: Reflections on Pre-Raphaelite Vision in Poetry and Painting,” in *Pre-Raphaelitism: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. James Sambrook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 253.

Looking at Mantegna's work, Rossetti concentrates on a figure *in* the painting and compares its situation to the position of an external viewer.¹⁵ Quite rightly, Barclay observes that the poem "complicates its [the painting's] portrayal of response," creating a cloud of ambiguity around the figure beside the dancers (Apollo) and the beholder of the painting.¹⁶ Whereas the two subjects are analogous at the level of seeing, they are not parallel when the viewer becomes a *reader*-viewer – that is, after the experience of acquiring the poetic version – or when the beholder becomes a *speaker*-viewer who "actively forms conjectures about the figure and the painting containing him [...]"¹⁷ as Barclay elucidates. In either case, however, the addition of the poetic element makes both the reader and the speaker better equipped for the interpretations of the scene than either the viewer or the participant are. The interpretations are conducted simultaneously by the figure from within and by the "modern observer." Nevertheless, in no way is the latter analysis a scrutiny of the artist's "mind's labor":¹⁸ it is a receptive reading which neglects Mantegna as the "author" whose "meaning fills the image." Barclay suggests that what we are comparing here is Apollo's seeing of the dance, on the one hand, and the observer's perception of the painting, on the other.¹⁹ It is true only when the assessment takes into consideration both the painterly and the poetic; the mere observer is not likely to focus on the dance without immediate insights into the other stories of the painting. In the poem, he will find a narrowing of the field of perception.

Similarly to Apollo, a modern viewer or reader/viewer is equally doomed to "run to nought" if they look for "meanings" because meaning *emerges* repeatedly, each time one approaches artistic expression. Rossetti substantiates that by the employment of reference-less pronouns in the sestet: "it" in the tenth line, "its" and another "it" in the next one, finally, one more "it" in the thirteenth line all seem to refer either to the "meaning", to the "dance" or to the "music." As McGann notes, "The pronouns open every kind of border and defining limit of possibility of dissolution [...]"²⁰ The little pronoun "it" dissolves the meanings, unties references and concepts gathered by Rossetti, accentuating the dismemberment of the

¹⁵ John Barclay, "Consuming Artifacts: Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Aesthetic Economy," *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 35, no. 1 (1997), pp. 6-7.

¹⁶ John Barclay, "Consuming Artifacts...", p. 7.

¹⁷ John Barclay, "Consuming Artifacts...", p. 7.

¹⁸ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 189.

¹⁹ John Barclay, "Consuming Artifacts...", p. 8.

²⁰ McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti...*, p. 80.

“meaning” of an artistic act. Yet, “it” serves another crucial purpose: destroying the borders, it obliterates the one between the verbal and the visual – through the cross reference with the seeming lack of the referent. According to McGann, “‘It’ is the poem’s central emblem for each of the text’s faceted words and phrases, which reflect and transform themselves in their process of reflection.”²¹ Rossetti makes associations both to the transformed and to the not-yet-transformed; the all-encompassing “it” enables him to do that.

All things considered, Rossetti does not give us “clues” to the allegory, as Paul Franklin Baum rather naively maintains.²² Instead, his transformation from the painterly to the poetic lies in providing the reader/viewer with guidelines on how to perceive a painting and how *not* to look for authorial “meanings.” Rossetti ponders on the sense a painting has for an onlooker, assuming that the traditional, intellectual interpretation can be futile. He imagines a situation in which the “modern spectator” can stand side by side with a figure from the canvass and witness the same scene or, otherwise, in which the figure’s “sensation” is equal to the observer’s spectatorship.



Tiziano Vecellio (Titian) *Le Concert champêtre (A Venetian Pastoral)*²³

²¹ McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti...*, p. 24.

²² Paul Franklin Baum, ed. *Poems, Ballads and Sonnets. By Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New York: Doubleday Doran, 1937), p. 165.

²³ “The painting sometimes goes by the title *Fête Champêtre* (or *Pastorale*). The attribution to Giorgione, though still thought possible by some scholars, is now largely rejected.” – “For a Venetian Pastoral, by Giorgione:

Apollo, playing his lyre, made himself heard to the nymphs and to the viewer of *Parnassus*; a moment when music pauses is expressed by Giorgione in *A Venetian Pastoral*. Rossetti's reaction on seeing the painting was intense; in his own account, he relates rushing through Louvre together with William Holman Hunt, and coming across "a pastoral [...] which is so intensely fine that I condescended to sit down before it and write a sonnet. You have heard me rave about the engraving before, and I fancy have seen it yourself. There is a woman, naked, at one side, who is dipping a glass vessel into a well; and in the centre two men and another naked woman, who seem to have paused for a moment in playing on the musical instruments."²⁴ Much of the poet's attention in the sonnet focuses on the intensity of the short temporal experience visualised on the canvass. The ephemerality of the scene is achieved through an emphasis on the images of the "solstice," a short moment at which the sun seems to stop moving,²⁵ and the water that slowly, reluctantly "sighs" in the vessel held by a woman standing by the well:

Water, for anguish of the solstice: – nay,
But dip the vessel slowly, – nay, but lean
And hark how at its verge the wave sighs in
Reluctant.²⁶

Rossetti slows down the time, but he also makes the atmosphere of the scene quiet to consecrate the silence of the intermission in music:

Hush! beyond all depth away
The heat lies silent at the brink of day:
Now the hand trails upon the viol-string
That sobs, and the brown faces cease to sing,
Sad with the whole of pleasure.
[...] Let be: –
Say nothing now unto her lest she weep,²⁷

Whereas Rossetti addresses the woman on the left directly, using an imperative, he only reflects on the other woman's temporary state. A reference to her nakedness, made in a manner fitting the momentary nature of the scene, creates a deeply sensual

Commentary," *The Rossetti Archive*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, January 2008, <<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/40-1849.raw.html>>.

²⁴ William Michael Rossetti, ed. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters, with a Memoir* (London: Ellis and Elvey, 1895), I, 71.

²⁵ Kenneth R. Ireland, "A Kind of Pastoral: Rossetti's Versions of Giorgione," *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 17, no. 4 (1979), p. 308.

²⁶ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 188.

²⁷ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 188.

image of the flutist who has just paused to catch a breath; the moment of silence thus achieved powerfully emphasises the mood of evanescence:

[...] Whither stray
Her eyes now, from whose mouth the slim pipes creep
And leave it pouting, while the shadowed grass
Is cool against her naked side?²⁸

The poet stresses the fact that the scene itself is stretched in time (the shadowed grass cools down), but the glimpse of the painter's eye catches only the momentary action. The flute touching the woman's lips or, in fact, the space between the lips (that are invisible in the picture) and the mouthpiece corresponds to the temporal interval in between the staves of music. Accordingly, the famous last line of the sonnet: "Life touching lips with immortality" fuses the realms of the past, the present and the future and reveals Rossetti's desires to prolong the depicted scene.²⁹

"Let be," "say nothing" and "Be as it was" are other imperatives of the sonnet that are addressed to an imaginary witness of the scene who is begged not to interfere and not to disturb the participants. The bystander can easily be equated with a viewer of the painting: Rossetti's appeals may with the same force apply to anyone looking at *A Venetian Pastoral*. According to Barclay, the poet uses the painterly image to explore the active distance between the work of art and its beholder.³⁰ Also, Jonathan Fredeman claims that the boundaries between a painting and a beholder are being analysed in the sonnet, mainly through the manipulation of the boundaries between the arts.³¹ Indeed, Rossetti involves the reader/viewer into the scene: there is a clear change of perspective in the speaker's first addressing the woman with a vessel and, then, talking to the viewer. The speaker of the sonnet becomes a mediator between the world frozen in the painting and the external agent. The involvement is potentially deeper than mere spectatorship; the command: "Say nothing unto her lest she weep"³² implies direct participation in the lady's would-be misery. The subsequent part of the same sentence, "nor name this ever," shifts the addressee's attention to another realm: the joy of pure sensual perception. There *is* no place or need for naming, acknowledging the situation; any intellectual attempt at discerning

²⁸ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 188.

²⁹ Ireland, "A Kind of Pastoral...", p. 308.

³⁰ Barclay, "Consuming Artifacts...", p. 8.

³¹ Jonathan Fredeman, *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism and Commodity Culture* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1990), p. 21.

³² Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 188.

the logic behind it is doomed to failure. Giorgione's work has no particular theme or plot apart from the one related with a concert – as the original title *Le Concert champêtre* suggests – which is being performed by the trio of two gallants and the flutist. There is no internal bond among the figures from the painting: the woman with the water-pitcher “wears an expression of calm detachment”;³³ the flutist seems to “gaze out beyond the picture space,”³⁴ overlooking the two gallants who face each other being “uninterested in, and psychologically isolated from the female nudes.”³⁵ The onlooker introduced by Rossetti functions thus as a link putting the dispersed pieces together and a subject combining the poetic with the painterly.



Jean-August Dominique Ingres, *Roger and Angelica* (*Ruggiero Delivering Angelica*)

A transformation resting on notions of spectatorship combined with a changed temporal perspective of the source-painting can be noticed in the pair of Rossetti's sonnets on Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres' *Roger and Angelica*. In the poems, the speaker captures a momentary vision of a dramatic event, beginning with a snapshot of the scene in the first sonnet:

³³ Ireland, "A Kind of Pastoral...", p. 308.

³⁴ Ireland, "A Kind of Pastoral...", p. 307.

³⁵ Ireland, "A Kind of Pastoral...", p. 307.

A remote sky, prolonged to the sea's brim:
 One rock-point standing buffeted alone,
 Vexed at its base with a foul beast unknown,
 Hell-birth of geomaunt and teraphim:
 A knight, and a winged creature bearing him,
 Reared at the rock: a woman fettered there,
 Leaning into the hollow with loose hair
 And throat let back and heartsick trail of limb.

The sky is harsh, and the sea shrewd and salt:
 Under his lord the griffin-horse ramps blind
 With rigid wings and tail. The spear's lithe stem
 Thrills in the roaring of those jaws: behind,
 That evil length of body chafes at fault.
 She does not hear nor see—she knows of them.³⁶

As John Dixon Hunt notices, there are no main verbs in the octet; all action is represented in a purely visual form.³⁷ The section reveals what is happening to Angelica who seems to be oblivious of the whole occurrence: “She does not hear nor see – she knows of them;” the woman does not sense the surroundings, but she rather experiences what Hunt calls “the instant mental apprehension of visual images.”³⁸ This replacement of sensory perception with mental knowledge surfaces also in the initial stages of the second sonnet:

Clench thine eyes now, – 'tis the last instant, girl:
 Draw in thy senses, set thy knees, and take
 One breath for all: thy life is keen awake, –
 Thou mayst not swoon.³⁹

The speaker claims that it is her last moment; still, Angelica does not actually see the danger (she is looking away), neither does she notice the rescuer – she only “knows of them,” which is visualised by the pose she assumes and the tormented expression on her face. The viewer of the painting has an advantage over the miserable woman only in the realm of sensory perception; moreover, this is all he *can* see. The visual story apparently starts and ends at the stage of Roger's fight with the monster in an attempt to rescue confined Angelica; Rossetti, however, adds the continuation of the plot: he presents the scene following the struggle, broadening thus the temporal scope:

³⁶ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 189.

³⁷ Hunt, “A Moment's Monument...,” p. 253.

³⁸ Hunt, “A Moment's Monument...,” p. 253.

³⁹ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 189.

Now, silence: for the sea's is such a sound
As irks not silence; and except the sea,
All now is still. Now the dead thing doth cease
To writhe, and drifts. He turns to her: and she,
Cast from the jaws of Death, remains there, bound,
Again a woman in her nakedness.⁴⁰

Next, the speaker contemplates the tension that has just developed – the one between a man and a nude woman:

He turns to her: and she,
Cast from the jaws of Death, remains there, bound,
Again a woman in her nakedness.⁴¹

At this particular moment, she is safe from death but not from the gaze of a man; she is still tied up and naked. The situation suddenly turns erotic; yet, the sexual reading of the poem does not apply to the post-rescue stage only: McGann points to the phallic elements of the scene (the images of the orc and the spear) and to Angelica's "post-coital lassitude."⁴² One may intensify this reading of the work with another connotation, namely, the orgasmic character of the moment the woman experiences which is alluded to by Giorgione in the spasm-like pose of the tied female body.



Sandro Boticelli, *La Primavera* (Allegory of Spring)

⁴⁰ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 189.

⁴¹ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 189.

⁴² "For Ruggiero and Angelica by Ingres: Commentary," *The Rossetti Archive*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, January 2008, <<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/39-1849.raw.html>>.

Rossetti's transformation of Ingres's painting develops in two directions: first, he emphasises the dramatic irony of the scene: the viewer or the reader are aware of the facts that the female figure is oblivious of; secondly, the poet conjectures a continuation of the scene, broadening thus the temporal dimension. In the sonnet entitled "For *Spring*, By Sandro Botticelli," the poet assumes a different approach to temporality. The source, Botticelli's painting *Spring*, shows an assembly of mythological figures who, supposedly, take part in the ritual of nature being reborn through the metamorphosis of Roman goddess Flora.⁴³ The attendants are Venus, occupying the middle sector of the picture, Zephyr, Cupid, the Three Graces and Mercury. Each of the figures is situated in a separate section of the picture, and each is busy with an *a priori* assigned role: Cupid is aiming his love-arrows, Zephyr and Flora are embracing and the Graces are dancing in isolation. The ritualistic character of the scene, the divided spectrum and the allotted parts make the spectacle resemble a theatrical performance. Rossetti, opening his sonnet on the painting, refers to the scene as a "masque" and continues with the enumeration of the *dramatis personae*:

What masque of what old wind-withered New-Year
Honours this Lady? Flora, wanton-eyed
For birth, and with all flowrets pranked and pied:
Aurora, Zephyrus, with mutual cheer
Of clasp and kiss: the Graces circling near,
'Neath bower-linked arch of white arms glorified:
And with those feathered feet which hovering glide
O'er Spring's brief bloom, Hermes the harbinger.⁴⁴

Later in the poem, he calls the actors "mummers," questioning thus the quality of the show. Once again, Rossetti is interested in the momentary action: some unspecified instant of time at which the spring is being born ("Spring's brief bloom"); the moment incorporates also the short phase of the season's development at which the young stems are "Birth-bare, not death-bare yet."

The state is transient but also cyclic. Rossetti wonders how one can question the "dead Springs"; this means that the ceremony is repetitive but not cognisable. The pagan ritual of cyclic time offers a mystery for the speaker of the sonnet:

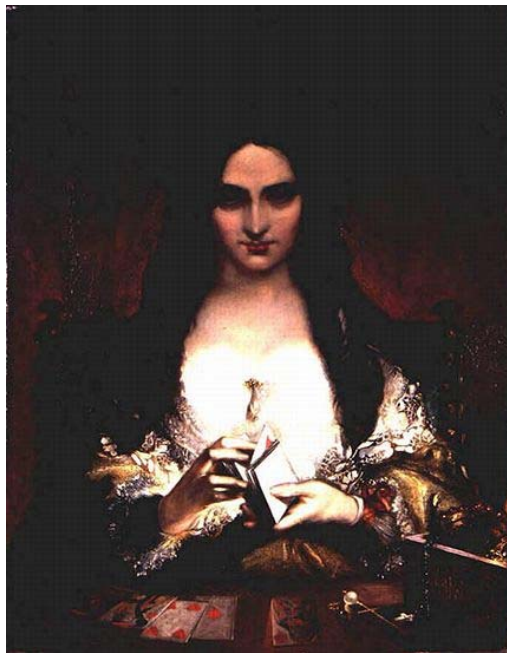
What mystery here is read
Of homage or of hope? But how command

⁴³ Emil Kren and Daniel Marx, "La Primavera, "Allegory of Spring"," *Web Gallery of Art*, Feb. 2002, <<http://www.kfki.hu/~arthp/html/b/botticel/allegory/primaver.html>>.

⁴⁴ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 232.

Dead Springs to answer? And how question here
These mummers of that wind-withered New-Year?⁴⁵

The speaker's inquires concern, first, the quintessence of the ritual; second, the transient nature of time; finally, the vivacity of a work of art. Of all these issues, the last one seems to be crucial because questioning the possibility of a contact with the figures from the painting, Rossetti creates a distance between the viewer and the work of art itself: the incomprehensibility of the ritual and the unfeasibility of communication separate the artistic from the reasonable.



Theodor Von Holst, *The Fortune Teller*

There is a case in which Rossetti goes beyond the momentary, even though, he begins with capturing a short-lived experience. The poem “Card Dealer” which contemplates Theodore Von Holst’s painting *The Fortune Teller* bases on the enthralling gaze of the woman with supernatural powers:

Could you not drink her gaze like wine?
Yet though its splendour swoon
Into the silence languidly
As a tune into a tune,
Those eyes unravel the coiled night
And know the stars at noon.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 232.

⁴⁶ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 174.

Rossetti seems to be captivated by the gaze and his “attention becomes fixed upon the slightest, most minute visual qualities”⁴⁷ of which the palms of the woman’s hands are the foci:

Her fingers let them softly through,
Smooth polished silent things;
And each one as it falls reflects
In swift light-shadowings,
Blood-red and purple, green and blue,
The great eyes of her rings.⁴⁸

The occult activity of cartomancy which occupies the fortune teller is, however, detached from the world of the viewer; instead, the observer and the reader are both drawn into the play that is taking place:

Within a vain strange land:
A land without any order, –
Day even as night, (one saith,) –
Where who lieth down ariseth not
Nor the sleeper awakeneth;
A land of darkness as darkness itself
And of the shadow of death.⁴⁹

The speaker of the poem himself becomes “a player in the game of chance,”⁵⁰ but he is only a representative of the human race; together with him, any viewer can enter the world and join the game:

Whom plays she with? With thee, who lov’st
Those gems upon her hand;
With me, who search her secret brows;
With all men, bless’d or bann’d.
We play together, she and we,⁵¹

The game proves to be a fatal one: the colours of the clairvoyant’s cards signify morbid occurrences:

The heart, that doth but crave
More, having fed; the diamond,
Skilled to make base seem brave;

⁴⁷ Stanley M. Holberg, “Rossetti and the Trance,” *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 8 (1970), p. 310.

⁴⁸ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 174.

⁴⁹ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 174.

⁵⁰ Jerome Hamilton Buckley, “The Fear of Art,” in *Pre-Raphaelitism: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. James Sambrook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 190.

⁵¹ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 174.

The club, for smiting in the dark;
The spade, to dig a grave.⁵²

This is a game “she plays with all / Beneath the sway o’the sun,” but, sadly, the card dealer is the only person who can name it and the only one who knows the exact rules; moreover, she already knows the score:

Thou seest the card that falls, – she knows
The card that followeth:
Her game in thy tongue is called Life,
As ebbs thy daily breath:
When she shall speak, thou’lt learn her tongue
And know she calls it Death.⁵³

The superior position of the figure in the painting is evident: no one can compete with a prophet in a game that involves future occurrences.

In his meditation on Von Holst’s painting, Rossetti manages to accomplish an intriguing effect; namely, he creates an ideal reader/viewer who is parallel to the speaker of the poem. Through the latter’s direct addresses towards the former, the poet makes the reader/viewer enter, first, the world of artistic expression and, secondly, the realm of the combined painterly and the poetic imagination. The reader/viewer is experiencing, as Holberg suggests, a trance-like frame of mind.⁵⁴ Such a state can be justified by the hypnotic qualities of the woman’s gaze but also by analogous attributes of the painting itself.

Another element that singularises the poem is the fact that this time Rossetti goes beyond the usual concentration on the moment. Obviously, the incentive lies in the temporary act captured in the painting, but the poet employs here a general reflection on life that is symbolised by the act of fortune telling. Similarly to the strange land the speaker enters, the reflection of the painterly is also “timeless beyond the momentary momentousness of transitory experience.”⁵⁵ Thus, the poet reaches further regions than the ones visited in his works on Ingres’, Boticelli’s or Burne-Jones’ paintings.

⁵² Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 174.

⁵³ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 175.

⁵⁴ Holberg, “Rossetti and the Trance,” pp. 309-310.

⁵⁵ Buckley, “The Fear of Art,” p. 191.



Hans Memling, *St. John's Triptych*

The episode of the so-called Spiritual Espousal to Christ of St. Catherine of Siena, captured by Hans Memling in his *St. John's Triptych*, serves Rossetti to muse on a religious occurrence expressed in art. Once again, the focus of the poet's attention is a "pause" during which the holy Child sets the ring on the woman's finger and, simultaneously,

Mary Virgin turns
 The leaf, and reads. With eyes on the spread book,
 That damsel at her knees reads after her.
 John whom He loved, and John His harbinger,
 Listen and watch.⁵⁶

Rossetti devotes the whole octet to recapture the passion of the saint's experience:

MYSTERY: Catherine the bride of Christ.
 She kneels, and on her hand the holy Child
 Now sets the ring. Her life is hushed and mild,
 Laid in God's knowledge—ever unenticed
 From God, and in the end thus fitly priced.
 Awe, and the music that is near her, wrought
 Of angels, have possessed her eyes in thought:
 Her utter joy is hers, and hath sufficed.⁵⁷

Tranquillity, devotion, awe and thoughtfulness compose the woman's response to the event. Barclay associates the intensity of Catherine's emotions during the act with the experience of the viewer of Memling's painting, creating thus a correlation

⁵⁶ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 190.

⁵⁷ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 190.

between vision and participation. Still, unlike in the case of Mantegna's painting, the figure of the saint from the picture and the external viewer cannot be fully parallel; Catherine's experience is entirely spiritual and inward whereas the sensation of the viewer depends on the outward and the perceived.⁵⁸ In this way, the distance between an artwork and the audience widens although Rossetti tries to involve the viewer in the scene in the last words of his sonnet: "Whereon soe'er thou look, \ The light is starred in gems and the gold burns." Nevertheless, only sensory perception is offered to the viewer. Rossetti clarifies at the outset what the essence of the scene is, opening the sonnet with the word "Mystery" which, according to David Riede, shows "the independence of the work from even the possibility of verbalized interpretation."⁵⁹ In other words, the quintessence of the portrayed experience is not to be discovered through the senses. Rossetti makes the distance between the artwork and its viewer impossible to overcome, but, at the same time, he manages to cover another void: the one between the religious and the aesthetic – with the help of the "sensuous resources of the painting."⁶⁰



Leonardo da Vinci, *The Virgin of the Rocks*

⁵⁸ Barclay, "Consuming Artifacts...", p. 10.

⁵⁹ David G. Riede, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Limits of Victorian Vision* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983), p. 216.

⁶⁰ Barclay, "Consuming Artifacts...", p. 9.

A distinct group of Rossetti's *Sonnets for Pictures* is composed of the poems which contemplate depictions of Virgin Mary. The common feature of the series of sonnets is Rossetti's equipping the mother of god with qualities and abilities that do not always follow the Christian doctrine; needless to say, the emphasis on the unorthodox makes Rossetti's representations of Mary idiosyncratic. Accordingly, in "For Our Lady of the Rocks by Leonardo da Vinci" the poet does not adhere to the pictorial elevation of the Virgin's status which is achieved by da Vinci, for instance, in the detailed treatment of her face. Rossetti scarcely notices that attribute; instead, he reconstructs the reasons for bending the face in prayer upon her son:

And does the death-pang by man's seed sustained
In Time's each instant cause thy face to bend
Its silent prayer upon the Son, while He
Blesses the dead with His hand silently
To His long day which hours no more offend?⁶¹

The Virgin is being sadly reminded of human mortality in "Time's each instant" while she is praying for the dead who are blessed with her son's hand. *His* time is not to be measured: "His long day which hours no more offend"; that is to say, the instants of time do not affect him. Rossetti does not try to clarify the mood of darkness and perplexity surrounding the Virgin and the child. It is enough to locate them "amid the bitterness of things occult".⁶² in a setting that serves as a veil through which one can only survey the order of the holy kingdom. A work of art that represents such an indistinct sphere can be itself treated as an object of a vague approach. As a result, "the bitterness of things occult," in Rossetti's rendition, applies to the religious *and* the aesthetic experience concurrently: both art and religion are to be perceived through this veil of indistinctness and understatement.

The temporal structures in this group of Rossetti's sonnets differ from the ones connected with Ingres', Giorgione's and Mantegna's paintings; here, the poet is rather interested in the eternal than in the momentary. In "For Our Lady of the Rocks," he identifies the sea that is seen in the background with the "infinite imminent Eternity" and the typical dimness of Leonardo's landscape with "the darkness of the end, The Shadow of Death." The gloomy background serves as a herald of approaching death of Jesus and his ensuing eternal reign. In this sonnet,

⁶¹ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 171.

⁶² Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 171.

“the heard lapse of darkness” signifies the life of Virgin Mary “since first her task began”: a period she lives through being conscious of the future of her child who now is still “a babe” but, at the same time, “perfect and chosen.” The unwelcome knowledge is a burden for Mary, the source of her “anguish” and the major focus of Rossetti’s attention.

Analysing “For *A Virgin And Child* By Hans Memmelinck,”⁶³ one comes to a conclusion that in lines 3-4 the poet captured a moment of suspension “the ended pang of knowledge [...] now is calm assured.”⁶⁴ As Gail Lynn Goldberg explains, Rossetti manages to express the suspension that is typical of an iconic poem; he achieves that through his use of the present tense, a temporal adverb, an expletive “there” but also through the employment of sound; for instance, by means of many accented syllables, repetition, alliteration and rhyme.⁶⁵ However, the poet is magnetized by the power of Mary’s prophecy which, combined with her concern about the child, allows Rossetti to poetically fast-forward the action to the inevitable moment: Jesus’ death. Equally, the time prior to the moment captured in the painting is also indicated by Rossetti: “since first her task began / She hath known all”; the application of such a vast time span demands from the reader/viewer an active imaginative collaboration to put the scene “in a wider temporal context” as Landow calls it.⁶⁶ The sequence of events the poet alludes to provides a background for the momentary vision of the painterly. This does not mean, however, that the visual itself is incomplete in this respect: both the past and the future are indicated in Memling’s work: the former in the expression of Mary’s face, the latter in the symbolic Passion Fruit held by the child.⁶⁷

⁶³ The sonnet has been most commonly connected with Memling’s St. John’s Triptych, but, as Goldberg proves, the association is still a matter of critical disputes. (For a wider analysis of the sonnet’s connection with its visual source(s), see Gail Lynn Goldberg, “Rossetti’s Sonnet on ‘*A Virgin and Child* by Hans Memmelinck’: Considering a Counterpart,” *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 24, no. 3 (1986), pp. 230-234.)

⁶⁴ Gail Lynn Goldberg, “Rossetti’s Sonnet on ‘*A Virgin and Child* by Hans Memmelinck’: Considering a Counterpart,” *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 24, no. 3 (1986), p. 238.

⁶⁵ Goldberg, “Rossetti’s Sonnet...,” pp. 238-9.

⁶⁶ George P. Landow, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s ‘For *A Virgin and Child*, by Hans Memmelinck,’” *Replete with Meaning: William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, in: *The Victorian Web*, ed. George P. Landow, January 2002, <<http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/whh/replete/hans.html>>.

⁶⁷ Landow, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s ‘For *A Virgin and Child*, by Hans Memmelinck’.”



A Master of Manchester, *Madonna and Child with Angels*

Rossetti appends an even more extensive time perspective to the painting labelled as *The Manchester Madonna*.⁶⁸ In the poetic equivalent, the Virgin is also equipped with prophetic powers owing to which she is able to predict the future encompassing the time from the Fall to the Crucifixion:

Still before Eden waves the fiery sword,—
Her Tree of Life unransomed: whose sad Tree
Of Knowledge yet to growth of Calvary
Must yield its Tempter,—Hell the earliest dead
Of Earth resign,—and yet, O Son and Lord,
The seed o' the woman bruise the serpent's head.⁶⁹

She is not willing, though, to reveal any of the mysteries to her young son: “Not yet Thine hour of knowledge.”⁷⁰ Hence, in the painting, she prevents him from reading the “prophet’s page,” the scroll with his sufferings foretold. Yet the prophetic abilities of the Virgin form Rossetti’s own idiosyncratic doctrine.⁷¹ Therefore, in Rossettian equivalents of both Memling’s and Michelangelo’s works, it is not easy to read the poetic and the pictorial jointly; one can hardly resist an autonomous treatment of the arts in those cases. The painters’ works prove their autonomy, but as

⁶⁸ The painting was once attributed to Michelangelo, but now it is known as an unfinished work by an unidentified artist associated with Manchester; “For the *Holy Family* by Michelangelo: Commentary,” *The Rossetti Archive*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, January 2008, <<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/10-1880.raw.html>>.

⁶⁹ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 232.

⁷⁰ Rossetti, *The Works of...*, p. 232.

⁷¹ George P. Landow, “Problems of Interpretation,” in *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows: Biblical Typology and Victorian Literature, Art, and Thought*, in: *The Victorian Web*, ed. George P. Landow, January 2002, <<http://65.107.211.206/victorian/type/ch4d.html>>.

Goldberg states: “Sufficiency of vision, however, does not mean supremacy of vision,”⁷² and the poetic counterpart can always provide an additional, idiosyncratic reading. In fact, in the Michelangelo sonnet, Rossetti invents a new verbal work, explaining the visual one through the use of additional types to resolve the poem.⁷³

* * *

In conclusion, spectatorship and temporality, as two distinct but overlapping notions, help to prove that the painting-poetry distinction is more than a mere sign system change. A poetic transformation of the visible emphasises the ambiguities of the process of perception, like the indistinctness of the possible perspectives – the painter’s, the viewer’s, the character’s, the speaker’s or the poet’s. The confusion over the viewpoint may lead to the levelling of the particular subjects’ roles, for instance: the viewer gets invited into the realm of the picture to become a figure within the frames, or the speaker becomes a viewer. In the most extreme case, the speaker assumes the role of the painter, the viewer and/or a character participating in a scene (as in Rossetti’s poem on Mantegna’s *Parnassus*). On the other hand, a conversion of the material, from a visual to a verbal image, creates a possibility of a game with time in which the seemingly still, momentary scenes in painting acquire new temporal dimensions. The scope of the altered time perspectives includes simple prolongations but also “pregnant moments,” i.e. images potentially bestowed with the chronological “before” or “after.” As it turns out, the poet, as a “converter” of signification systems, seldom simply elucidates, describes or reflects but rather produces distinct visions that are parallel to those represented in the visual form.

⁷² Goldberg, “Rossetti’s Sonnet...,” p. 241.

⁷³ Landow, “Problems of Interpretation.”

Chapter 4: PAINTERLY REFLECTIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF POETRY

The following chapter presents analyses of Pre-Raphaelite paintings in correlation with the literary sources that served as the inspiration of the visual works. As it will be demonstrated, the painterly translations are varied and distinctive, which is a result of the diversity of approaches towards the source-works among the Pre-Raphaelite painters. The selection includes Dante Gabriel Rossetti's, John E. Millais's and William H. Hunt's transformations of the poetic achievements of Dante Alighieri, William Shakespeare, John Keats and Alfred Tennyson; each of the separate sections focuses on a particular poet's work and its visual version(s). The particular interpretations are followed by conclusions which point to the major operations and their results that occur during the conversion process.

I. ROSSETTI'S DANTESQUE THEME OF THE DEATH OF BEATRICE

Dante Alighieri was the ultimate literary source and pattern for Rossetti. The Pre-Raphaelite poet-painter translated most of the *Vita Nuova* and used themes from the work throughout his career; the most prominent example of the fascination with the mediaeval source is certainly Rossetti's specific transformation of Dante's Beatrice. The concept of woman as a divine figure preoccupied the Victorian artist in the early stages of his work; later, he began to combine the saintly with the earthly. Rossetti used the story of Beatrice's life included in *Vita Nuova* as a spiritual version of his own wife's lot: for Rossetti, Beatrice's and Lizzie Siddall's deaths were two versions of the same emotional incident. The painting *Beata Beatrix*, although not intended to represent death (which Rossetti clearly stated in a comment to the work¹), shows the moment of Beatrice's passing away as described by Dante. Rossetti's Beatrice is as pure as Dante's: consciously or not, he paints her with an aureole formed by the illuminated background. The painting powerfully emphasises the figure's chastity: in Dante, although described as a pure Damozel, Beatrice is constantly referred to as an earthly love object; in Rossetti, the earthly is being replaced by the spiritual. Comparing the painting to other Rossetti's depictions of women, it is clear that in *Beata Beatrix* represents the "saintly" approach to

¹ H. C. Marillier, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Illustrated Memorial of his Life and Art* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1899), p. 128.

femininity which was employed also in the portrayals of Virgin Mary, rather than the “fleshly” one, visible in works like *Bocca Baciata* or *Lady Lilith*. Nevertheless, Beatrice cannot be classified as an asexual being: although the robe she is wearing can be seen as a veil designed to cover her sexuality, the sensual appeal of the face and the neck is clearly highlighted by Rossetti. In David G. Riede’s assessment, “death becomes sexually attractive”² in this painting; elsewhere, the critic asserts that *Beata Beatrix* embodies one of Rossetti’s foremost ideals: to combine flesh and spirit, life and death.³



D.G. Rossetti *Beata Beatrix*

² David H. Riede, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Limits of Victorian Vision* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 249.

³ David G. Riede, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti Revisited* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), p. 84.



D.G. Rossetti *Dante's Dream on the Day of the Death of Beatrice*

Yet there is neither dramatic flavour nor pathos in the woman's depiction. Her closed eyes suggest the loss of contact with the world and a mild turning to the new life in heaven; interestingly enough, by closing the eye-lids of the depicted figure, Rossetti managed to capture the poetic image of "the eyes that weep."⁴ The woman's death is a specific trance which is slow, gentle and spiritually refined. Rossetti's Beatrice has already left this world: the city in the deep background is fuzzy, barely discernible. The figure situated in the in the right-hand upper corner, who supposedly represents Dante himself, the earthly lover, is slowly disappearing too; he is being replaced by the spiritual love that is appearing in the left-hand upper corner. The process lingers, and it is prolonged to a larger extent in the painting than in *Vita Nuova* in which version Beatrice is referred to as a damozel who "hath gone to Heaven suddenly."⁵ Paradoxically, the poetic momentariness is enormously stretched out by the painter; what is more, the accompanying symbols accentuate the ensuing prolongation: the sundial is a very suggestive marker of lingering time; the dove, crowned with an aureole and carrying a white poppy, signifies death and chastity. Moreover, Beatrice's passing away is "justified" by the poetic idea of the earth being unworthy to host a being so pure as she was. Lastly, what differentiates the two versions of the incident is a shift of the foreground of the reader/viewer's attention: the poetic expression is focused on Dante's long lasting grief; in the

⁴ Dante Alighieri, "The New Life" in *The Early Italian Poets from Ciullo D'alcamo to Dante Alighieri*, trans. D.G. Rossetti (London: Smith, Elder And Co., 1861), p 288. published in: *The Rossetti Archive*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, June 2006, <<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/1-1861.rad.html>>.

⁵ Alighieri, "The New Life" in *The Early Italian....*, p. 288.

painterly version of the same incident, the most significant phenomenon is Beatrice's reaction to her own death.

The story of Beatrice's death continues in *Dante's Dream on the Day of the Death of Beatrice*; again, it is *Vita Nuova* that forms the background of Rossetti's rendition:

Then Love spoke thus: 'Now all shall be
made clear:
Come and behold our lady where she lies.'
These idle phantasies
Then carried me to see my lady dead:
And standing at her head
Her ladies put a white veil over her;
And with her was such very humbleness
That she appeared to say, 'I am at peace.'⁶

The artist wrote a prose ekphrasis of the painting's iconology in which he explains the main symbolic connotations:

The subject of the picture is drawn from the 'Vita Nuova' of Dante, the autobiography of his earlier life. It embodies his dream on the day of the death of Beatrice Portinari; in which, after many portents and omens, he is led by Love himself to the bedside of his dead lady, and sees other ladies covering her with a veil as she lies in death. The scene is a chamber of dreams, where Beatrice is seen lying on a couch recessed in the wall, as if just fallen back in death. The winged and glowing figure of love (the pilgrim Love of the *Vita Nuova*, wearing the scallop-shell on his shoulder,) leads by the hand Dante, who walks conscious but absorbed, as in sleep. In his other hand Love carries his arrow pointed at the dreamer's heart, and with it a branch of apple-blossom, which may figure forth the love here consummated in death,—a blossom plucked before the coming of fruit. As he reaches the bier, Love bends for a moment over Beatrice with the kiss which her lover has never given her; while the two dream-ladies hold the pall full of may-bloom suspended for an instant before it covers her face for ever. These two green-clad women look fixedly on the dreamer as if they might not speak, with saddened but not hopeless eyes.

The chamber of dreams is strewn with poppies; and on either side of the recessed couch two open passages lead to staircases, one upward one downward. In these staircases are seen flying two birds, of the same glowing hue as the figure of Love—the emblems of his presence filling the house. In these openings, and above where the roof also lies open, bells are seen tolling for the dead; and beyond in the distance is the outer world of reality—the city of Florence, which, as Dante says, 'sat solitary' for his lady's death. Over all, the angels float up-wards, as in his dream, 'having a little cloud in front of them;'—a cloud to which is given some semblance of the beatified Beatrice.⁷

⁶ Alighieri, "The New Life" in *The Early Italian...*, p. 271.

⁷ D. G. Rossetti, "Dante's Dream on the Day of the Death of Beatrice: 9th of June, 1290," in: *The Rossetti Archive*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, June 2006, < <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/23p-1881.broadside.rad.html>>.

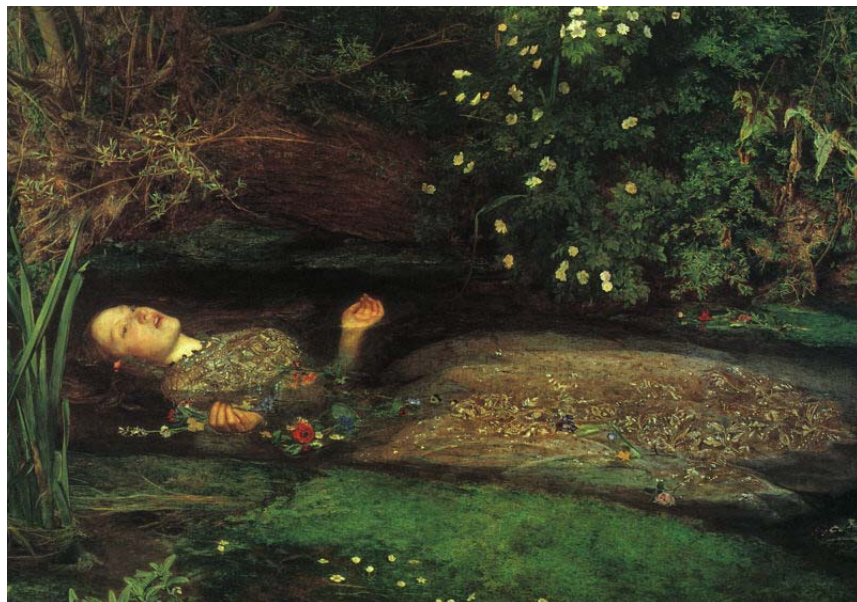
“The outer world of reality,” that Rossetti refers to, is more vivid in this painting than in the previous one; however, the viewer concentrates on the foreground which has visionary origins. Although, in fact, it is the scenery of Dante’s dream vision, the perspective that Rossetti assumes is not Dante’s: it is the onlooker’s point of view. The viewer enjoys the privilege of watching both Dante and Beatrice before, during and after her death. The confusion of the actual moment of the woman’s passing away is inherent in Rossetti’s rendering of *Vita Nuova*. Therefore, it is not just a mere stretching out of temporality that he proposes: Rossetti offers different versions of the time of Beatrice’s death; the moment presented in *Beata Beatrix* appears to be the most personal.

In *Dante’s Dream*, one gets to witness the actual drama of the lovers’ farewell; the most striking image is the spiritual Love who is kissing Beatrice, not Dante himself, even though he is also present at the bed of the dying woman. The obvious conclusion is that, at this particular moment, Beatrice has already entered the realm of spirituality, and none of the earthly sensations can reach her. Still, an air of deficiency or non-fulfilment of their love is also implicit in Rossetti’s seeing of the scene. The branch of apple blossom held by Love symbolises the feelings intensely: the flower has been destroyed, and the coming of the fruit is impossible. Therefore, the fact that Beatrice dies as an innocent woman does not imply a positive assessment of her life but rather a feeling of her own dissatisfaction. Rossetti points to Dante as the one who is disappointed to the same extent; in the painting, Dante is only watching Love kissing Beatrice, which is an act that he has never performed himself.

In both paintings discussed above as well as in other depictions of the theme, such as, for instance, *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice*, Rossetti’s treats Beatrice as a spiritual icon. The figure becomes a myth that is used to express the sorrow and abandonment of the man who loved her; in reality, it is not Beatrice herself who is significant for Rossetti: it is her death that concerns him most, notwithstanding his denial of that fact. In this respect, the Pre-Raphaelite resembles Dante from the sections of *Vita Nuova* devoted to the mourning after Beatrice’s death: Rossetti is likewise subjective in the visual portrayal, and also for him, the figure symbolises a world outside, a self that cannot be reached. The insoluble question that arises is whether he actually portrays Dante’s Beatrice or his own Lizzie Siddall.

II. PRE-RAPHAELITE REFLECTIONS OF SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTERS

The Pre-Raphaelite treatment of Shakespeare's works in the following argument centers around two perspectives. The first one concerns the technical refinement of Millais's paintings *Ophelia* and *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel*; both renderings can be assessed as "botanically naturalistic" illustrations of particular fragments of the literary source. The other approach to Shakespeare surfaces in Hunt's visual interpretations of the bard's plays *Claudio and Isabella* and *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus* which touch on issues connected with private morality and gender relations.



J. E. Millais *Ophelia*

Looking at *Ophelia*, the viewer is forced to struggle to actually notice Ophelia's face which is surrounded by almost invisible hair soaked in water. The woman's dress, floating on the surface, blends with the herbage of the river banks; in her hands, she is holding flowers that also merge with the surrounding greenery, making the picture even more confusing. The wealth of the botanical details in this painting is dictated by the literary source; the rendition has been attributed to Queen Gertrude's account of Ophelia's death from the fourth act of *Hamlet*:

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

There is a willow grows ascaunt the brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,

That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
 But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.
 There on the pendant boughs her crownet weeds
 Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke,
 When down her weedy trophies and herself
 Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
 And mermaid-like a while they bore her up;
 Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds,
 As one incapable of her own distress,
 Or like a creature native and indued
 Unto that element. But long it could not be
 Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
 Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
 To muddy death.⁸

Millais, however, takes this “botanical realism”⁹ further, making it an inseparable attachment to Ophelia’s madness and her subsequent death. As Elizabeth Prettejohn notes, the multitude of plants flattens the painting and stresses “the claustrophobic intensity of the subject matter.”¹⁰ The image of Ophelia engulfed in the greenery corresponds to her state of being overwhelmed by mental problems. In Shakespeare’s account, she starts singing “snatches of old tunes,”¹¹ while floating on the water, and indeed Millais notices that: his Ophelia is opening her mouth to sing. In the painting, the signs of activity on Ophelia’s face (although it is pale and her eyes are faint) and the consciously moving arms suggest that the moment of her death is postponed. Both Shakespeare and Millais make their readers/viewers aware of that fact; in the play, it is remarked on by Gertrude:

[...] But long it could not be
 Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
 Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
 To muddy death.¹²

Nevertheless, Millais’s version does not even foreshadow the “muddy death” that is hinted upon by Shakespeare; the painting does not present a scene of death: the surroundings evoke an Arcadian or pastoral happening.

A setting that resembles the one used in *Ophelia* is created by Millais in *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel*; the painting illustrates an episode from *The Tempest* during which Ariel, accompanied by spirits, enchants Ferdinand with his song. The

⁸ William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 682.

⁹ Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2000), p. 172.

¹⁰ Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 185.

¹¹ Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, p. 682.

¹² Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, p. 682.

richness of natural detail is combined here with the appearance of a ghostly event. Still, the clash between the natural and the supernatural is smoothed by Millais; he makes the fantastic creature's green colouring melt into the natural greenery of the landscape, creating a life-like analogy.¹³ In fact, the only unnatural, not to say unfitting, figure is Ferdinand who vividly contrasts in colour. His behaviour is also incongruous: in a gesture of active listening, he is bending towards Ariel whom he cannot actually see, which is made clear by Shakespeare in the secondary text.¹⁴ Consequently, a clash that is more lucid to the viewer is the one between the natural and the human.



J. E. Millais, *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel*

What links this picture with the previous one is not only the microscopic detail of the rendition but also an invitation to active looking.¹⁵ In *Ophelia*, the very fact that the viewer is forced to search for the woman's face in the amalgamation of plants produces certain visual curiosity. An addition of the botanical richness of plants and a minute bird in the left hand, upper corner of the painting, results in an

¹³ Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 188.

¹⁴ Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, p. 1173.

¹⁵ Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 174.

absorbing effect: Millais constructs a visual maze which the viewer has to go through to arrive at the object of representation. In *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel*, the maze turns into a puzzle and is even more intricate; Millais manages here to fool the viewers (or just critics): superficially, one discovers an element of oddity in the opposition between the supernatural creatures and the natural surroundings; still, the artist reallocates this oddity to the juxtaposition of the natural and the human.



W. H. Hunt *Claudio and Isabella*

Hunt's *Claudio and Isabella* has its source in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* in which play the story of the figures from the picture revolves around a moral dilemma presented to the heroine. Claudio, a young gentleman, is imprisoned for fathering a child out of wedlock; however, the ruler of Vienna, Angelo, offers a stay of the execution to Claudio's sister, Isabella, a novice in a sisterhood of nuns, in exchange for her virginity. Thus, Claudio's guilt of immoral behaviour is to be redeemed by his highly moral sister's loss of innocence. Isabella, though, rejects the proposal, and this is exactly the episode Hunt attempted to illustrate, showing her

breaking the news to Claudio. Clearly, the discord of both figures' condition is emphasised in the expressions of their faces: Claudio's disappointment and Isabella's deep concern for her brother's lot. The woman is deeply sorry for the decision she has just made; her chastity is virtuous but cruel: she has to refuse to save her brother's life in the name of religious beliefs. Claudio's feeling of desperation and disappointment is noticeable in Hunt's painting, and it is indicated by Shakespeare as well:

CLAUDIO

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
[...]

The weariest and the most loathed worldly life
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
Can lay on nature is a paradise
To what we fear of death.¹⁶

Claudio deeply deplores his past life, but his lamentation is hypocritical; he must remember his illicit relationship with Julietta – a symbol of “worldly life” which actually was not “weariest and the most loathed” for him. Hunt stresses the contrast between Claudio's thought of evading life and the beauty of human existence represented by the blossom outside the window; perceiving the idyllic scenery of the exterior, the viewer realises that Claudio is forced to leave a blissful place.



W. H. Hunt *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia*

¹⁶ Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, p. 802.

A similar situation, in the perspective of its moral taint, is visualised by Hunt in *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia*. Here, the dramatic situation is taken from Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*; the painter concentrates on the scene during which Valentine discovers his friend's, Proteus's, disloyalty. The mischievous act consists in Proteus's attempted seduction of Valentine's fiancée, Sylvia, in which way Proteus betrays both his friend and his own lover, Julia, who is observing the whole incident. Proteus's attempt at raping Sylvia was triggered by her refusal to show him gratefulness: he freed her from the hands of wrongdoers who had previously captured the woman. Hunt's depiction of the scene resembles, in Prettejohn's opinion, Rossetti's *Found* in which picture the "fallen" woman literally assumes a submissive position.¹⁷ In Hunt, it is the man, Proteus, who kneels down in disgrace. He indicates deep embarrassment stroking his back with the left hand whereas the other figures maintain the upright position; the spectacle produces the effect of a strong moral disparity concerning the characters. In both paintings, the fallen and the upright figures are linked with the bond of clasped hands; the Rossettian woman is being supported by her former lover, and Hunt shows the friendship between Valentine and Proteus. However, one cannot equate those gestures of linkage; while Rossetti shows sympathy for the fallen girl, Hunt makes the upright figure scornful. The way in which both friends hold hands suggests that Proteus is begging Valentine for forgiveness, even attempting to support it with a kiss on his hand, which strictly follows Shakespeare's treatment of the incident:

PROTEUS
 My shame and guilt confounds me.
 Forgive me, Valentine. If hearty sorrow
 Be a sufficient ransom for offence,
 I tender't here. I do as truly suffer
 As e'er I did commit.¹⁸

Remarkably enough, Proteus's betrayal is double: he is disloyal to his friend, and, at the same time, being oblivious of her presence, he cheats on his lover, Julia. The woman's drama is another leading theme of Hunt's painting although Shakespeare does not pay too much attention to the betrayed Julia's feelings (she is disguised as Sebastian, a page attending Valentine); the only words that she utters during the

¹⁷ Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 211.

¹⁸ Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, p. 23.

scene are the following: "O me unhappy!"¹⁹ She is taken aback by what she has just seen, and Hunt stresses that in his rendition of the figure. The painterly version lacks any consolation offered to Julia, and Shakespeare comforts the woman after her identity is revealed: Proteus concludes that, after all, Julia's face is "more fresh" than Sylvia's and chooses to marry the former lover.

William Holman Hunt in both *Claudio and Isabella* and *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia* employs the discourse of sexual morality. The sexual intercourse is in both cases an act of wrongdoing: in *Claudio and Isabella*, sex is to be punished with death which verdict cannot be overturned with the aid of moral virtue. The man is clearly an evildoer; the chains fettering him and the black cloth leave no doubt about that. Still, the painter draws a dividing line between the actual act and the attempted one as the other painting proves: Proteus is humiliated but forgiven. Simultaneously, another clear-cut line is drawn in Hunt's illustrations of Shakespeare: the one between goodness and wickedness. In the paintings discussed above, the viewer is immediately able to determine who is the virtuous personality and who deserves condemnation. In conclusion, it may be stated that Hunt deals with ambiguous topics with quite an unequivocal approach.

III. LINGERING MOMENTS IN PRE-RAPHAELITE RENDITIONS OF KEATS'S POETRY

John Keats's "Isabella; or the Pot of Basil," as its subtitle suggests, retells a story taken from Boccaccio; precisely, from Novel V in day 4 of *Decameron*. Three brothers, merchants from Messina, who intend that their sister, Isabella, shall marry a nobleman. The woman, however, falls in love with the family's attendant, Lorenzo. The brothers, upon discovering the inappropriate match, decide to murder Lorenzo and bury his body in a secret place. Isabella learns about the spot where the body is hidden from Lorenzo himself who appears to her in a dream vision; after finding the corpse, she cuts off the head and puts it in a pot with a plant of basil covering it. She cherishes the pot as a relic, but soon her brothers notice that and, burning with curiosity, steal the pot and discover the severed head. Fearing that their crime will be revealed, they flee from the town. Isabella goes into mourning over the lost object of devotion and subsequently dies.

¹⁹ Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, p. 23.

There are few deviations from the original storyline in Keats's poem; the most significant one is the attack on commercial life noticed, for instance, by Julie F. Codell in her essay on the poem. The critic points to Keats's condemnation of the brothers' greed and cruelty to their employees as well as to the poet's attention to the economics of Lorenzo's life.²⁰ The poet concentrates on Isabella's love misery but, at the same time, constantly refers to her and Lorenzo's subservience to the despotic brothers whose wickedness seems to be derived, in Keats's eyes, from their status of capitalist "money-bags,"²¹ as they are referred to in stanza XVIII. Such a treatment of the source becomes a certain divergence from Boccaccio's storyline as, according to Francis T. Palgrave, "Boccaccio, true to his usual creeping morality, treats their [the brothers'] conduct to Lorenzo as a piece of natural common sense."²² In addition, the poet criticises social conventions for the reason that they are conditioned by economy and uses the lovers' devotion as a form of resistance to conventional values.



J. E. Millais, *Isabella*

In his painterly version of the story, Millais takes up the Keatsian motif of the wickedness of commercialism, which is very strongly developed in stanzas XIV-

²⁰ Julie F. Codell, "The Dilemma of the Artist in Millais's *Lorenzo and Isabella*: phrenology, the gaze and the social discourse," *Art History*, vol. 14, no. 1 (1991), pp. 56-7.

²¹ John Keats, *The Works of John Keats* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), p. 199.

²² from Francis T. Palgrave's note to the poem in: John Keats, *Poetical Works* (London: Macmillan, 1884), *Bartleby.com*, June 2006, <www.bartleby.com/126/>.

XVIII, and treats it as a counterforce of the young lovers' feelings. The Pre-Raphaelite painter invents a scene at the table to portray the lovers and the intricate relations within the family; the episode does not appear in Keats's poem except for the brief remark: "They could not sit at meals"²³ which that actually contradicts the painterly rendition. Millais's association with Keats can be still corroborated by the fact that the painting, during its first exhibition, was accompanied by two stanzas from "Isabella":

I.
 FAIR Isabel, poor simple Isabel!
 Lorenzo, a young palmer in Love's eye!
 They could not in the self-same mansion dwell
 Without some stir of heart, some malady;
 They could not sit at meals but feel how well
 It soothed each to be the other by;
 [...]
 XXI.
 These brethren having found by many signs
 What love Lorenzo for their sister had,
 And how she lov'd him too, each unconfines
 His bitter thoughts to other, well nigh mad
 That he, the servant of their trade designs,
 Should in their sister's love be blithe and glad,
 When 'twas their plan to coax her by degrees
 To some high noble and his olive-trees.²⁴

The pictorial "flatness"²⁵ of the work does not interfere with an onlooker's desire to place the lovers at the first level of narration and perception. One immediately notices Lorenzo's gentleness in the manner he serves Isabella with a plate of oranges; the woman's shyness and her reserve (or embarrassment) in being served are also evident. The attitude is all the more understandable when one realises that, because of the difference in the social status, the lovers were not supposed to sit at one table as Keats's aforementioned remark suggests (interestingly enough, Millais does not give Isabella a seat, placing her at the very edge of the bench!). The social differences among the figures are also rendered by the play of the garments' hues; the purplish colouring of male clothes contrasts with the darkness of female robes

²³ Keats, *The Works of...*, p. 194.

²⁴ Keats, *The Works of...*, pp. 194, 200.

²⁵ Lynne Pearce, *Woman/Image/Text: Readings in Pre-Raphaelite Art and Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 93.

and the servant's black attire. As Lynne Pearce notes, the colours visualise two basic dichotomies: they differentiate men from women and masters from servants.²⁶

The painting reveals yet another clash: the oasis of gentleness, devotion and easiness around Lorenzo, Isabella and the greyhound is being invaded by the wicked brother's extended leg. His attempt to kick the dog and the concurrent act of cracking a nut straightforwardly represent the man's violent character, but the gestures visualise also the conflict between the lovers and the rest of the family: the struggle for power that consists in the brother's commitment to save his social class from being corrupted by a man too lowly to enter it. The other brother does not concentrate on the meal either; looking at Lorenzo through the glass of wine, he seems to conspire against the two young people. The images foreshadow the ensuing events from the story; combined with another prefigurative element – the pot placed on the windowsill in the background – they serve Millais to convey the whole story of the lovers, without paying attention to any particular moment of their lives.²⁷

As it turns out, the painter's focus on a single event is illusory. By means of the painting's space division into the oppressors and the oppressed, the socially rewarded and the socially underprivileged, the artist constructs the socio-economic background of the story. In addition, the prefigurative hints at the upcoming developments in the narrative broaden the temporal scope of the image. For Julie F. Codell, the painting "fuses dramatic themes woven throughout the poem: the revelation of desire, the deferral of sexual consummation, and the threat of death."²⁸ Not only did Millais manage to correlate the separate themes of Keats's text, but he also achieved a "fetishised pastiche of art history and literature – proto-Renaissance style and spatial arrangements, translated and transcribed Renaissance literature (Boccaccio read through Keats), eighteenth-century English conversation-piece painting, and English Romantic poetry."²⁹ According to Levinson, both Keats's and Millais's rearrangements of the past are "bricolaged affairs,"³⁰ and Millais's version,

²⁶ Pearce, *Woman/Image/Text*, pp. 93-94.

²⁷ Pearce, *Woman/Image/Text*, p. 92.

²⁸ Julie F. Codell, "Painting Keats: Pre-Raphaelite Artists Between Social Transgressions and Painterly Conversions," *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 33, no. 3-4 (1995), pp. 348-9.

²⁹ Codell, "Painting Keats...", p. 350. Millais replicates the literary legacy, the conventions of painting but also the physical appearance of the portrayed figures; as Barringer notes, his meticulousness in re-creating the past made him use an illustrated account of historical costumes from Bonnard's *Costumes Historiques* – Tim Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 32.

³⁰ Marjorie Levinson, "Keats and His Readers: A Question of Taste," in: *Subject to History: Ideology, Class, Gender*, ed. David Simpson (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991), pp. 143-162; quoted in: Codell, "Painting Keats...", p. 350.

in turn, reaches to both predecessors – Keats and Boccaccio – re-presenting and recontextualising the past.³¹



W. H. Hunt *Isabella and the Pot of Basil*

William Holman Hunt, in his *Isabella and the Pot of Basil*, captures a moment when Isabella melancholically embraces the pot containing Lorenzo's head; the painting is conventionally connected with the following passage in Keats's poem:

LV
O Melancholy, linger here awhile!
O Music, Music, breathe despondingly!
O Echo, Echo, from some sombre isle,
Unknown, Lethean, sigh to us—O sigh!
Spirits in grief, lift up your heads, and smile;
Lift up your heads, sweet Spirits, heavily,
And make a pale light in your cypress glooms,
Tinting with silver wan your marble tombs.
LVI.
Moan hither, all ye syllables of woe,
From the deep throat of sad Melpomene!
Through bronzed lyre in tragic order go,

³¹ Codell, "Painting Keats...", p. 350.

And touch the strings into a mystery;
 Sound mournfully upon the winds and low;
 For simple Isabel is soon to be
 Among the dead: She withers, like a palm
 Cut by an Indian for its juicy balm.³²

Yet, Hunt differs from both Keats and Boccaccio: although madly possessed by the pot, his Isabella does not show signs of upcoming death; critics, like Judith Bronkhurst, describe her as “healthily looking”³³ whereas both the Renaissance story (“The young girl wept and wept, continuing to demand that her pot of basil be returned to her; and she died crying;”³⁴) and its Romantic retelling make it clear that the woman was slowly expiring:

Spirits of grief, sing not your “Well-a-way!”
 For Isabel, sweet Isabel, will die;
 Will die a death too lone and incomplete,
 Now they have ta’en away her Basil sweet.³⁵

Hunt’s treatment of the woman’s condition may be justified by the fact that, according to Keats, Isabella did “wither” after Lorenzo’s death; nonetheless, she still possessed the pot commemorating her lover, and only after her brothers had taken it away from her, she completely faded since then she lost her love for the second time.

As to other dissimilarities between the visual and the verbal versions of the story, critics point to the milieu shown in Hunt’s painting: the exotic, eastern interior and the altar-like *prie-dieu* to which Isabella comes barefoot to cherish her relic.³⁶ Certainly, the pot is neither a “garden-pot,”³⁷ as Keats has it, nor “a large and handsome vase, the kind in which marjoram or basil is grown,”³⁸ in Boccaccio’s words, but rather an exquisitely adorned vase. According to Codell, the *prie-dieu*, the altar cloth and the woman’s pose are borrowed from an illustration in the 1854 edition of Keats’s works; using it, Hunt reconstructs the antique twice, as the critic notes.³⁹ Through the details, Coddle continues, “Hunt sublimates Keats’s rich sensuous descriptions, displacing them into the imitation objects around Isabella.”⁴⁰

³² Keats, *The Works of...*, p. 209.

³³ Codell, “Painting Keats...,” p. 359.

³⁴ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella (New York: Signet Classics, 2002), p. 330.

³⁵ Keats, *The Works of...*, p. 210.

³⁶ Codell, “Painting Keats...,” p. 362.

³⁷ Keats, *The Works of...*, p. 208.

³⁸ Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, p. 329.

³⁹ Codell, “Painting Keats...,” p. 360.

⁴⁰ Codell, “Painting Keats...,” p. 361.

Regardless of his concentration on the ornamental objects, what Hunt achieves is a depiction of Isabella's withdrawal into the spiritual in her private shrine, as it were, visualising the "melancholy" from Keats's poem.

Evidently, Hunt concentrates on the spiritual dimension of the story, emphasizing the woman's misery and completely neglecting the socio-economic circumstances of the conflict between "order and desire"⁴¹ represented by Millais and Keats. Whereas Millais explicitly portrays an occurrence supposedly taken from the source story, Hunt presents the outwardly expression of intense internal emotions in the meditative portrayal of Isabella. The feature that additionally separates the two paintings is their temporal dimension: Hunt portrays a momentary action; Millais clearly "extends" the time location of the episode he depicts. Both works are repetitions of Keats's treatment of the source, but, as Codell notes, referring also to other achievements of the painters, "[n]one of the paintings are illustrations of their texts; all of them address pictorial conventions apart from the poetry, and in some cases critics were quick to point out how un-illustrative the paintings were, although they became popular Victorian images of Keats's poetry."⁴² Regardless of the fact whether the depictions are "illustrative" or not, their potential originality reveals itself in the successors' struggle to appropriate and revise the source, without denying the existence of a predecessor.



J. E. Millais, *The Eve of St. Agnes*

⁴¹ Codell, "Painting Keats...", p. 362.

⁴² Codell, "Painting Keats...", p. 366.



W. H. Hunt, *The Eve of St. Agnes (Porphyro during the drunkenness attending the revelry)*

In the case of Hunt's and Millais's illustrations of "The Eve of St. Agnes" by Keats, the approaches of both painters to the topic are also distant. The story of Madeline and Porphyro ends with the pair's elopement at St. Agnes' Eve night which is possible due to the drunkenness of the lady's guards, and this is exactly the scene that is portrayed by Hunt. The artist shows both lovers' cautiousness during the escape and their attempts not to wake the drunken Porter; the episode is also reported in the poetic version:

They glide, like phantoms, into the wide hall;
 Like phantoms, to the iron porch, they glide;
 Where lay the Porter, in uneasy sprawl,
 With a huge empty flaggon by his side;
 The wakeful bloodhound rose, and shook his hide,
 But his sagacious eye an inmate owns:
 By one, and one, the bolts full easy slide:—
 The chains lie silent on the footworn stones;—
 The key turns, and the door upon its hinges groan.⁴³

Millais, on the other hand, focuses on the bedroom scene during which Madeline undresses, unaware of Porphyro's presence. The painting shows the interior of the bedroom and the girl herself – half-undressed – in a pose she appears to Porphyro who is hidden in the closet:

Anon his heart revives: her vespers done,
 Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;
 Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one;

⁴³ Keats, *The Works of...*, p. 228.

Loosens her fragrant boddice; by degrees
 Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees:
 Half-hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed,
 Pensive awhile she dreams awake, and sees,
 In fancy, fair St. Agnes in her bed,
 But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled.⁴⁴

In comparison, it is Hunt who chooses a peculiar moment from the narrative and equips it with new meanings. His scene of the flight questions, or at least postpones, the happy ending of the story. The door is only slightly open, the dogs are awake and the festivity is still in progress; in such circumstances, the viewer cannot be sure whether they manage to escape. The painting clearly shows the distance between the enclave of the lovers (similar to the one in Millais's *Isabella*) and the region of festivity; in fact, Madeline and Porphyro escape from the festive way of life which, for the girl, is identified with her father who organised the ball. She rejects the superficial enjoyment as it is the delight allied with oppression that is signified here by the presence of the guards and symbolised by the chain at the door. The crucial factor that helps the lovers, first, to unite and, later, to get free is the phenomenon of sleep. It is the factor enabling Porphyro to seduce Madeline; she is not even able to distinguish between her dream lover and the real one:

Her eyes were open, but she still beheld,
 Now wide awake, the vision of her sleep:
 There was a painful change, that night expell'd
 The blisses of her dream so pure and deep
 At which fair Madeline began to weep,
 And moan forth witless words with many a sigh;
 While still her gaze on Porphyro would keep;
 Who knelt, with joined hands and piteous eye,
 Fearing to move or speak, she look'd so dreamingly.⁴⁵

Subsequently, the guards' drunken sleep enables the pair to flee.

Overlooking the preceding events in the story, Hunt removes the literary context from his rendition of the poem. He extracts the conclusion from Keats's work and puts it on canvass, forgetting about Porphyro's prior voyeurism and the sexually tense encounter in Madeline's bedroom. Both Keats and Hunt self-righteously acquit the man, letting Madeline accompany him after an incident which can be classified as Porphyro's taking advantage of the girl. Jack Stillinger goes as

⁴⁴ Keats, *The Works of...*, p. 222.

⁴⁵ Keats, *The Works of...*, p. 225.

far as to accuse him of an intended rape,⁴⁶ undermining previous "mystical" interpretations of the poem in which the lovers "unite in a mystic blending of mortality and immortality, chastity and passion, the moonlight of perfect form and the ruddiness of intense experience,"⁴⁷ as Earl Wasserman puts it. Keats's text is open to interpretation owing to the use of the dream device. Madeline is at no point certain if the intense experience she has gone through was related to her dream lover or the earthly one; she seems to attribute the occurrence to the St. Agnes Eve superstitions.

Porphyro's guilt extends to the time before the actual dream, to the scene of Madeline's stripping unconsciously in front of the man's eyes. Capturing this particular episode, Millais places the viewer of the painting in the closet from which Porphyro is gazing at the woman.⁴⁸ Revealing her body to the eyes of the peeping lover, Madeline had been bereaved of innocence even before she lost virginity literally; in both cases, the events are accompanied by her unawareness. Millais catches this dreamy unconsciousness, staying faithful to Keats's image of "a mermaid in sea-weed";⁴⁹ he makes her "dream awake" about the oncoming night and the awaited vision. Madeline falls prey to Porphyro's (and the viewer's) voyeuristic desires, and she will become the target of his sexual appetites when she lies down on the adjacent bed.

* * *

What unites the Pre-Raphaelite versions of Keats's poems is a certain duality of approach. The painters either present the outwardly expression of intense internal emotions or they portray superficial occurrences that "might be" taken from the source stories, simultaneously trying to grasp a broader context. The duality extends also to another opposition shown in the renderings: the explicit and perfunctory treatment of the St. Agnes theme by Hunt and Millais' version of "Isabella, or the Pot of Basil" clash with the implicit and pensive portrayals of Madeline by Millais and Isabella by Hunt. A common feature that can be found in the discussed works is a certain lack of momentariness, a quality so important and recurrent in pre-Raphaelite art. Although in each case the painter focuses on an instance of time, the reception by the viewer is either prolonged or contextualised which forces the viewer to take into

⁴⁶ Stillinger, *The Hoodwinking...*, p. 67-93.

⁴⁷ Earl Wasserman, *The Finer Tone: Keats's Major Poems* (John Hopkins Press: Baltimore, 1953), p. 121.

⁴⁸ Pearce, *Woman/Image/Text*, p. 111.

⁴⁹ Keats, *The Works of...*, p. 222.

consideration “the after” and “the before”; as a result, the artist manages to achieve the effect of a processional moment. Although conventionally affixed to particular stanzas in Keats’ poems, the Pre-Raphaelite painterly renditions encompass different fragments from the verbal source: as Julie Coddell puts it, they “telescope several separate scenes.”⁵⁰ This specific feature accounts for the paintings’ major contribution to the validation of the alliance between the arts: the works by Millais and Hunt can be treated as visual narratives.

IV. EROTICISM AND CONFINEMENT IN PRE-RAPHAELITE PAINTERLY VERSIONS OF TENNYSON’S POEMS



W. H. Hunt, *The Lady of Shalott*

Alfred Tennyson’s poem “The Lady of Shalott” served the Pre-Raphaelites as an immensely productive literary source. It gained popularity among the brethren, and Rossetti, Hunt, Millais but also Waterhouse, Mateyard and Elizabeth Siddall

⁵⁰ Codell, “Painting Keats...,” p. 351.

each created his/her own version (at least one) of the medieval legend transformed by the Victorian poet. The most impressive rendition of the topic belongs to Hunt who developed the idea through three different versions; two early drawings come from 1850 and 1857 and the final watercolour is dated 1889-1892. The evolution of Hunt's seeing of the subject has been widely analysed (for instance, by Andrew Leng,⁵¹ Elizabeth Prettejohn⁵² and Richard Stein⁵³), but the focus of the following argument will be the final version, the last painting Hunt ever completed.

It is not enough to say that the Lady of Shalott fits the idea of Pre-Raphaelite femininity; she conforms to the whole Victorian standpoint on the "Women Question."⁵⁴ Anonymous, isolated, focused on handiwork, she appears as a perfect "angel in the House." According to the legend, there is an unknown curse put on her which will be executed if she dares to abandon her duties and cross the border of the world reserved for her. Both Tennyson and Hunt present this exact moment: the instant at which the lady frees herself of the bonds of her previous position. In the first part of the tale, the poet puts her in cosy, comfortable and tranquil surroundings:

On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the world and meet the sky;
And through the field the road run by
To many-tower'd Camelot;
And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow
Round an island there below,
The island of Shalott.
Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver
Through the wave that runs for ever
By the island in the river
Flowing down to Camelot.
Four grey walls, and four grey towers,
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle imbowers
The Lady of Shalott.⁵⁵

There is only one fact she needs to realise – the existence of the curse (still, she is unaware of the exact fate hidden behind it) – and only one task she needs to perform:

⁵¹ Andrew Leng, "The ideology of 'eternal truth': William Holman Hunt and *The Lady of Shallott* 1850-1905," *Word&Image*, vol. 7 (1991), pp. 320-327.

⁵² Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, pp. 261-2.

⁵³ Richard L. Stein, "The Pre-Raphaelite Tennyson," *Victorian Studies*, vol. 24 (1981), pp. 291-296.

⁵⁴ Pearce, *Woman/Image/Text*, p. 72.

⁵⁵ Alfred Tennyson, *Idylls of the King and a Selection of Poems* (New York: Signet Classics, 2003), p. 295.

She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
The Lady of Shalott.⁵⁶

The woman's only connection with the outside world is maintained through the reflection in the mirror; therefore, the contact is distorted, imitated and indirect:

And moving through a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year,
Shadows of the world appear.
There she sees the highway near
Winding down to Camelot;
There the river eddy whirls,
And there the surly village churls,
And the red cloaks of market girls
Pass onward from Shalott.⁵⁷

She, in turn, imitates this already reflected image of the world in her weaving, which results in generating a work of art that is doubly imitative. The lady, however, is conscious of the mediocre quality of her handiwork and the emotional insufficiency of her life when, after observing a pair of lovers in the mirror, she shouts, "I am half sick of shadows."⁵⁸ The inescapable consequence of that statement was the act of breaking the vow and looking down to Camelot. The act of defiance was additionally fuelled by the visual influence of the glorious knight passing by but also by the aural stimuli: the clanging armour and jewellery as well as the meaningless tune sung by Lancelot:

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,
Like to some branch of stars we see
Hung in the golden Galaxy.
The bridle bells rang merrily
As he rode down to Camelot:
And from his blazon'd baldric slung
A mighty silver bugle hung,
And as he rode his armor rung
Beside remote Shalott.

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,
The helmet and the helmet-feather
Burn'd like one burning flame together,
As he rode down to Camelot.
As often thro' the purple night,

⁵⁶ Tennyson, "The Lady of Shalott," in *Idylls...* p. 296.

⁵⁷ Tennyson, *Idylls...*, p. 296.

⁵⁸ Tennyson, *Idylls...*, p. 297.

Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, burning bright,
Moves over still Shalott.⁵⁹

The curse is executed; the magic web loosens, and the mirror cracks – such a chain of events can also be a perfunctory summary of Hunt's rendition of the Lady's lot.

Hunt's Lady of Shalott is caught in a dynamic pose of shaking off the bonds. However, the web she has been weaving seems to fight back, entangling the woman with the loops of threads around her (described as "threads of a cocoon"⁶⁰ by Tennyson himself). It seems that not only does she weave the web, but also she herself is woven into it. The positioning of her hair and the dramatic movement of the rest of the body prove that the change of the status is not an easy task. The passage from the reflections of reality and the actual world requires extra strength which quality is visibly present in Hunt's picture: the lady is muscular, powerful and furious at her lot. Critics have claimed that the Lady actually struggles to pass from the private sphere to the public one or, from a different point of view, from the realm of femininity to the territory of masculinity.⁶¹ Both alternatives can be analysed in the nineteenth-century context: for Hunt, the Lady of Shalott is a Victorian construct since his contemporary women's struggle for equality is connected with similar social and gender alternatives, and it is equally challenging.

The ending of Tennyson's poem offers an interesting change of perspective: the Lady alters her position from a subject of artistic creation to an object of aesthetic perception:⁶² she abandons her weaving and leaves the castle. The evidence of the change in status is included in Lancelot's off-hand reflection on her dead body: "She has a lovely face";⁶³ she stays anonymous to the end but now she is also objectified.⁶⁴ Having entered the "world outside," the Lady of Shallot becomes a different woman; as Kathy Alexis Psomiades claims, there are, in fact, two women present in Tennyson's poem: the subject in the tower and the object in the boat.⁶⁵ Those two 'femininities' differ both in the perspective of artistic creation and in the field of eroticism. As Psomiades rightly observes, "By moving from private to

⁵⁹ Tennyson, *Idylls...* pp. 297-8.

⁶⁰ William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (Macmillan: London and New York, 1905), vol. 2, p. 124.

⁶¹ Kathy Alexis Psomiades, "Beauty's Body: Gender Ideology and British Aestheticism," *Victorian Studies*, vol. 36 (1992), pp. 34-35.

⁶² Psomiades, "Beauty's Body...", p. 34.

⁶³ Tennyson, *Idylls...*, p. 300.

⁶⁴ Psomiades, "Beauty's Body...", p. 34.

⁶⁵ Psomiades, "Beauty's Body...", pp. 35-36.

public, the Lady changes her nature. Leaving the ruined castle to sail down to Camelot, she no longer produces an artwork no one sees but is herself a visible art object.”⁶⁶ However, the lady changes her subject-object status in terms of her sexuality as well: first, dreaming about Lancelot and erotic love; then, *being looked at* and *commented on* by the knight in the last lines of the poem.



J. W. Waterhouse *The Lady of Shalott*

For the sake of comparison and to confirm Psiomades’s assertion that the woman actually possessed two personalities – one in the tower, the other in the boat – let us briefly mention another version of the subject, accomplished by a Pre-Raphaelite associate John William Waterhouse. His painting focuses on the ending of Tennyson’s poem; the Lady is portrayed in the boat heading for Camelot. The expression on her face is that of utter sadness, and the painter’s aim was clearly to represent the curse being realised. Instead of a wild, voluptuous woman, the viewer looks at an innocent, miserable girl in white robes. Generally, the depiction is closer to Tennyson’s poetic account than the one presented by Hunt. It is interesting, moreover, to notice in the painting an evident link between the two personalities: Waterhouse’s Lady of Shalott takes her artistic achievement with her as the web she had been weaving is draped around the boat in the form of a tapestry.

Any gender reading of Hunt’s rendition of the poem draws a viewer’s attention to a moment of female sexual awakening.⁶⁷ The voluptuous figure in a certainly sexualised pose, not to mention the erotically symbolic hair (abundant and

⁶⁶ Psiomades, “Beauty’s Body...,” p. 34.

⁶⁷ Leng, “The ideology of ‘eternal truth’,” p. 324.

dishevelled like in Rossetti's art), certainly facilitate an interpretation pertaining to the woman's sexuality. Lynne Pearce notices that throughout the story the Lady confronts the dilemma: Christian celibacy – Romantic love, and points to Lancelot as the one responsible for the woman's eventual arousal.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the image of the mirror is often interpreted as reflecting the woman's mind which is all possessed by the outer world, or rather by Lancelot, as the mirror shows his figure approaching the castle. The symbolic crack in the mirror, which appears at the moment of the execution of the curse, indicates thus an obliteration of the Lady's dream, rather than its accomplishment. Her mind's vision is being destroyed at this crucial moment; the Lady of Shalott enters 'reality,' liberating herself from the distorted realism of the reflections in the mirror. This, however, does not mean that her dream is fulfilled; her crossing the line between the inner and the outer denotes a failure: a failure to fulfil the assigned role. She decided to choose one of the extremes of the dilemma, and, consequently, the alternative disappears; therefore, it is hard to credit Pearce's reading of the symbolic cracking the mirror as *standing for* the dilemma between Romantic love and Christian devotion.⁶⁹



J.E. Millais *Mariana*

⁶⁸ Pearce, *Woman/Image/Text*, pp. 74-80.

⁶⁹ Pearce, *Woman/Image/Text*, pp. 76-78.

While Hunt's *The Lady of Shalott* transposes a medieval subject to Victorian times, Millais's *Mariana* functions similarly as far as a story from Shakespeare is concerned; additionally, both works focus on women of seemingly identical psychological condition and social status. According to Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Mariana, first betrothed to Angelo, loses his favours because of a sudden loss of wealth. Although the state of abandonment is temporary (Mariana finally marries Angelo), it is significant enough for Tennyson and for Millais. The Victorian poet, in his version of the tale, lays much emphasis on the natural surroundings the woman is situated in; as the poem's subtitle suggests, the subject is "Mariana of the moated grange," and it is the moated grange that the poet concentrates on in the initial lines, pushing Mariana to the background:

With blackest moss the flower-plots
Were thickly crusted, one and all:
The rusted nails fell from the knots
That held the pear to the gable-wall.
The broken sheds look'd sad and strange:
Unlifted was the clinking latch;
Weeded and worn the ancient thatch
Upon the lonely moated grange.
She only said, 'My life is dreary,
He cometh not,' she said;
She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!'⁷⁰

The pastoral surroundings are also used to express Mariana's emotions:

Upon the middle of the night,
Waking she heard the night-fowl crow:
The cock sung out an hour ere light:
From the dark fen the oxen's low
Came to her: without hope of change,
In sleep she seem'd to walk forlorn,
Till cold winds woke the gray-eyed morn
About the lonely moated grange.⁷¹

An insight into her mind is also reflected in the refrain: "I am aweary, aweary, / I would that I were dead!" This seemingly trivial repetition of phrases seems to have inspired Millais's rendition of the topic, and the artist managed to reflect the Lady's "weariness" in the positioning of her body. Clearly, she is stretching after long-lasting labour, but, simultaneously, she is looking out the window with a hopeful

⁷⁰ Alfred Tennyson, *Poems* (Moxon: London, 1860), p. 9.

⁷¹ Tennyson, *Poems*, p. 10.

expression on her face. The similarity to the Lady of Shalott is obvious: imprisoned within the interior of the chamber, both women are waiting for their dream lovers, weaving a tapestry design that displays what they can actually see outside the window. However, one difference is crucial: Mariana is waiting peacefully and lazily; the Lady of Shalott is animated, almost hysterical. The peacefulness of Mariana's "dreamy house" is underlined by Tennyson:

All day within the dreamy house,
The doors upon their hinges creak'd;
The blue fly sung in the pane; the mouse
Behind the mouldering wainscot shriek'd,
Or from the crevice peer'd about.
Old faces glimmer'd thro' the doors,
Old footsteps trod the upper floors,
Old voices called her from without.
She only said, 'My life is dreary,
He cometh not,' she said;
She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!'⁷²

This serenity is also stressed by Millais: in the images of the candlelight altar in the background, the leaves lying about and a mouse. The painter does illustrate the natural surroundings of the pastoral landscape, but they are visible only through the stain-glass windows; additionally, they are covered with, and distorted, by religious figures on the windowpanes which images are not even alluded to by Tennyson in the poem. Therefore, it can be stated that Millais, like Hunt, achieves a specific opposition: the saintly interior – the natural exterior. Both women face a dilemma whether to choose the religious, peaceful domestic existence or to enter the realm of worldliness. The barrier seems to be less radical in Millais's painting; the border is blurred with the leaves that are actually entering Mariana's chamber. Her yearning for the lover from the outside and the clearly expressed frustration make it clear that Mariana is in the state of psychological imprisonment. As Andrew Leng points out, the moat around is a kind of psychological moat that she is not able to overcome.⁷³

In Herbert Sussman's opinion, Mariana is "imprisoned by the idea of female chastity"⁷⁴ which comment implies erotic overtones. Indeed, Mariana's awaiting is sexual; it even verges on some bodily impatience. The pose Millais painted her in is

⁷² Tennyson, *Poems*, pp. 11-12.

⁷³ Andrew Leng, "Millais's *Mariana*: Literary Painting, the Pre-Raphaelite Gothic, and the Iconology of the Marian Artist," *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic Studies*, no.1 (1988), pp.70-73.

⁷⁴ Herbert Sussman, "The Pre-Raphaelites and the 'Mood of the Cloister,'" *Browning Institute Studies*, vol. 8 (1980), p. 49.

only apparently innocent: it is rather voluptuous or even provocative. The very fact that critics imagine Mariana without her clothes on (Pearce⁷⁵) proves that the sexual tension is inherent in the painting. One can go as far as to look for phallic connotations in the image of the poplar tree outside the window,⁷⁶ or to analyse the stanzaic structure of the poem in terms of its resemblance to female genitals.⁷⁷ Still, it is enough to state that Mariana, less in its poetic form and far more in the painterly image, conveys a comment on repressed female sexuality; in other words: a “comment” or rather criticism of Victorian attitudes towards femininity. Mariana’s current situation, as Shakespeare’s text clarifies, is caused by her loss of dowry. Angelo will not marry her without her possessions; hence, one may conclude that her sexual frustration is dictated by the lack of wealth.⁷⁸ This connotes a peculiar reversal of prostitution: Mariana needs material possessions to reach sexual (and social) fulfilment. Meanwhile, she is confined to her enclosed, domestic space and (auto) erotic expectations. In this aspect, both Tennyson’s ladies are comparable; the angel in the house becomes an impatient angel, desiring to leave the house, sometimes at all costs, as it happens in the case of the Lady of Shalott. In Mariana’s situation, the circumstances win over urges.

* * *

A general note on the Pre-Raphaelite renditions of Tennyson’s verse should include a remark that Hunt, Millais and Waterhouse actually transformed an already converted material since both poems by Tennyson employ previously existent literary themes as their subjects. Leaving aside the links between the literary versions, and focusing on the poetry – painting transformation, the most striking feature that assimilates Hunt’s and Millais’s portrayals of female characters is the new context in which the women are situated. The painters make both the Lady of Shalott and Mariana serve as expressions of Victorian femininity. Even though the Pre-Raphaelites achieve different effects – Hunt’s portrayal is dynamic while Millais’s is tranquil – the meanings surfacing in the visual versions are similar, and in both cases they concern female suppressed sexuality. As it has been demonstrated, the decontextualisation of the literary source does not necessarily involve a major departure from it, in the perspective of the relationship between the arts. Despite the

⁷⁵ Pearce, *Woman/Image/Text*, p. 66.

⁷⁶ Pearce, *Woman/Image/Text*, p. 66.

⁷⁷ Elaine Jordan, *Alfred Tennyson* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1988), p. 60.

⁷⁸ Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 12.

differences in particularities, the presentation of these female characters' personalities in poetry corresponds to the painterly renditions, which verifies the proximity of verballity and visuality. However, the particular dissimilarities shown in various images constituting the verbal and the visual versions, combined with the device of decontextualisation, are equally significant contributions to the discussion of the correspondence between the arts, as it has been proposed as the basic assumption of the dissertation.

Chapter 5: POETIC QUALITIES OF PRE-RAPHAELITE PAINTING

The argument in this chapter focuses on a selection of Pre-Raphaelite paintings that, unlike the works discussed so far, are seemingly detached from any literary influences that could have been involved in their conception – none of the paintings presented in this section serves as a prescribed counterpart of a literary text. The goal of this research is to prove that they can still be analysed in terms of their literary value, which will contribute to the general aim of the dissertation: to prove the interconnection of poetry and painting. In order to attain that objective, the paintings are discussed from the perspective of basic poetic features that can be revealed in their interpretations: the features that surface outside the field of the literal transformation of a poetic work into the visual one.

The selection of qualities relies on the traditional division of poetry into the narrative and the lyric, and includes important compositional and stylistic elements of expression like spatiality, temporality, mood and emotion creation. The analysis considers particular functional factors such as the role of the narrator, the levels of narration and the rhetorical figures in verbal texts, juxtaposing them with the role of the background, ornaments and the spatial organization of visual works of art in order to find parallels and counterparts between the two forms of artistic expression. First, however, the question of the constitutive elements of painting – the frame and the title – is looked into and scrutinized from the perspective of the contribution of these components to the interartistic relations. More specifically, the opening section concentrates on the corresponding roles that they have in both arts: the title as the element straightforwardly combining the verbal with the visual, and the frame as a structural device having similar functions in painting and in poetry.

I. THE TITLE AS A VERBAL HEGEMON

The element that most clearly links the two arts is the title of a painting; here the verbal and the visual come to a meeting point – the visual work reaches out to the world of verbalism. The problem of title-attachment has been present in criticism in the context of the functions that titles perform; scholars have categorized the verbal labels of paintings into functional classes, considering the interrelationship between

the verbal and the visual.¹ Titles, alongside with frames and ornaments, are treated as *parerga* by Derrida, who introduces the issue of labelling in *Truth in Painting* by asking apparently basic questions like: “what is a title? And what if *parergon* were the title?”² Having admitted that the problem of title attachment is one of the crucial critical concerns, the French philosopher continues the inquiry: “On the way we will no doubt encounter the question of the title. What happens when one entitles a ”work of art”? What is the *topos* of the title? Does it take place (and where?) in relation to the work?”³ The list of Derrida’s questions goes on and contains, among others, the problem of the title’s interiority and exteriority (or its position on/over “the edge”) with reference to the space of the work of art. The following argument will take into account some of the questions asked in *The Truth in Painting*, complemented by the functional categories of titles proposed by Seweryna Wyślouch, with certain adjustments made to adapt them to the selection of Pre-Raphaelite paintings discussed in the present chapter. First, however, a broader theoretical foreword on the nature of the title-painting relationship will be attempted. The introduction will refer to some of the problems discussed by Roland Barthes in his essay “Rhetoric of the Image,” in which the French philosopher discusses the issue of the verbal labelling of a pictorial representation. Accordingly, the leading assumption of the ensuing discussion is a claim that the viewer’s looking at a painting is motivated by the verbal title through which one is told “what to see” in an image; the title becomes a verbal device that cuts off all the “irrelevant” ways of looking. As the primary example, William Holman Hunt’s *Our English Coasts, 1852* (Fig. 1)⁴ will be used.

The fact that a text achieves its meaning only in a context is an established truth, as is the fact that a change of context affects the text’s significance. Therefore, whenever it is possible to provide a wide choice of contexts in which a text can be read, problems will arise. In effect, contextual analysis may not be a valid practice in distinguishing the significance of visual texts; as I will try to prove, meaning can fall under the dominance of seemingly peripheral elements, like the titles of visual texts, in which case the title may dictate the context. The reason to use the example of

¹ Mieczysław Wallis, “O tytułach dzieł sztuki,” in: *Sztuki i znaki. Pisma semiotyczne* [Arts and Signs. The Semiotic Writings] (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1983), pp. 254-8. and Seweryna Wyślouch, *Literatura a sztuki wizualne* [Literature and the Visual Arts] (Warszawa: PWN, 1994), pp. 139-156.

² Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 18.

³ Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 24.

⁴ Due to their number, all the illustrations indicated in this chapter are listed separately; the in-text notes refer to the Appendix (pages 219-232).

Hunt's painting to illustrate the functioning of the title is the specific history of the work's labelling: in 1853, the Royal Academy exhibited William Holman Hunt's work *Our English Coasts, 1852*, while an exhibition in Paris in 1855 showed the same painting under the title *Strayed Sheep*. That change (allegedly never approved by Hunt himself) was dictated by a change in general political mood; the first title was clearly connected with the contemporary political and historical situation in the country. It was supposed to be a satire on the defencelessness and vulnerability of Britain in the face of the looming danger from the French side in the light of Louis-Napoleon's growing power. The renaming of the painting completely changes the standpoint from which it is supposed to be interpreted.

It can be safely said that in titles, arbitrariness loses its battle with motivation: once the label is attached, only a motivated reading is possible. Neither is it plausible to read the painting naively rejecting the knowledge of its title(s), to come back to a virginal image that has not been named yet (assuming that untitled paintings are also excluded from the discussion). The label has been attached, and the only path to the comprehension of the visual image leads through a multitude of pieces of information that the viewer has to gather and select with the guidance of the verbal image. Such an appraisal of the verbal text is reminiscent of Barthes' delineation of the photographic image and its label in which "the text constitutes a parasitic message designed to connote the image, to 'quicken' it with one or more second-order signifieds. [...] the image no longer *illustrates* the words; it is now the words which, structurally, are parasitic on the image."⁵ The original title of Hunt's painting is such a "parasitic text"; *Our English Coasts, 1852* generates a new dimension of the visual component, a new choice of signifieds. The linguistic text, parasitic as it is, forces the viewer to be suspicious of what is visible and to look for hidden meanings; it also "loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination."⁶ The reading process of the *Strayed Sheep*, on the other hand, is passive; the painting becomes a target for a lazy eye. Moreover, it is not an amplification that the first title achieves: it "produces (invents) an entirely new signified which is retroactively projected into the image, so much so as to appear denoted there."⁷ The title – not just

⁵ Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in: *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 25.

⁶ Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," p. 26.

⁷ Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," p. 27.

a parasite, but rather a hegemon, a controller – forces the viewer to see “our English coasts” in an innocent rural landscape.⁸

The hegemon’s domain is a text woven from ambiguous elements whose meaning disseminates progressively; Barthes formulated this idea in his fourth proposition in “From Work to Text”:

The Text is not a co-existence of meanings, but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination. The plural of the Text depends, that is, not on the ambiguity of its contents, but on what might be called the *stereographic plurality* of its weave of signifiers (etymologically, the text is a tissue, a woven fabric).⁹

The web of sign-vehicles carries a handful of potential meanings but these are the meanings “not-achieved-yet.” On the other hand, as has become common knowledge, any language/code (although Barthes mentions at this point only the language of images) is not only composed of the sum of messages emitted but also of the messages received.¹⁰ Consequently, meaning – in some measure – also depends on the process of reception; it emerges at the level of the reader or the viewer. The plurality of a text’s meaning rests thus in the viewer’s selection of the particular elements; he decides which of them are taken into consideration and which are left out. Needless to say, the above procedure makes every act of perception only fragmentary.¹¹ The viewer, in such a situation, enjoys a certain liberty of choice, but the preordained existence of the title largely delimits it; the selection of the digits¹² has to be coherently adjusted to the title’s verbal ordinance. Barthes admits that “all images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a ‘floating chain’ of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others”;¹³ nonetheless, the French philosopher points to the linguistic message as one of the techniques to “fix the floating chain of signifieds” and “counter the terror of uncertain signs.”¹⁴ Indeed, the linguistic message – the title – is a convenient tool to identify the visible, to recognize its elements and achieve the pure satisfaction of knowing “what it is.”

⁸ My article “Image and Text: A Case of Barthesian Anchorage in William Holman Hunt’s *Our English Coasts, 1852 (Strayed Sheep)*,” (*The Review of the Pre-Raphaelite Society*, vol. XIV, no. 1 (2006), pp. 18-27) contains a more extensive analysis of Hunt’s painting.

⁹ Barthes, “From Work to Text,” in: *Image, Music, Text*, p. 159.

¹⁰ Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” p. 47.

¹¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. R.C. McCleary (Evanstone: Northwestern UP, 1964), p. 19.

¹² The term “digit” is used by Nelson Goodman in his discussion of the “digital” versus “analog” schemes and systems of notation in the arts. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), pp. 159-194 *et passim*.

¹³ Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” p. 39.

¹⁴ Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” p. 39.

An extension of that type of recognition is found at the level of understanding and interpretation; reading the title, the viewer “chooses the correct level of perception”¹⁵ focusing the gaze but also the understanding.¹⁶ With symbolic messages, the viewer uses the linguistic addition to guide his interpretation, or rather to delimit its proliferation.¹⁷ Barthes’ term for this function of the linguistic text attached to the visual one is “anchorage,” a technique used to direct the reader through the signifieds of the image. According to this concept, the reader is “remote-controlled” by the text “towards a meaning chosen in advance.”¹⁸ The repressive value of the linguistic text is, nevertheless, both the creator’s and the viewer’s authority over the visual messages’ dissemination, a right which was seriously violated in the case of Hunt’s painting: the “original” title appended by the creator was changed. Yet, the present-day *viewer* still retains the right to control the reading of this visual text.

Let us now review the titles of the other paintings discussed in this chapter; the scrutiny follows a typology present in the critical research which encompasses the functional categories of titles.¹⁹ Wysłouch divides titles into three major groups: the identifying, the prompting/instructing²⁰ and the ones structurally integrated with the work of art; however, such a classification calls for some particularisation as further subdivisions are possible. The identifying function, in which titles verbalise what is represented by nonverbal means,²¹ can appear as a purely descriptive one in portraits or landscapes such as: Millais’s *Esther, Stella, A Waterfall in Glenfinlas* and Brown’s *An English Autumn Afternoon* (Figs. 2-5). These titles name a whole view that is usually static. However, the figures’ actions and emotions can also be named with straightforward descriptive titles like *A Street Scene in Cairo: The Lantern Maker’s Courtship* by Hunt, *The Rescue* and *The Escape of a Heretic* by Millais, Rossetti’s *Reverie* and Brown’s *Work* (Figs. 6-10). A title describing an activity or a mental state draws the viewer’s attention to the act itself, diverting the concentration from the figures as subjects of portraiture. In neither of the two groups do the titles bring extra information to the painting’s meaning apart from the identity of the

¹⁵ Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” p. 39.

¹⁶ Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” p. 39.

¹⁷ Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” p. 39.

¹⁸ Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” p. 40.

¹⁹ The review will be based on the typology established by Wysłouch with a few adjustments and sub-divisions.

²⁰ The vagueness of the Polish original denomination “funkcja pragmatyczna” in original requires an approximation in translation.

²¹ Wysłouch, *Literatura a sztuki wizualne*, p. 141.

figures and the setting designation. Still, the identifying function may become crucial to the interpretation when a historical character is depicted, as we can see in examples such as *Cromwell on His Farm* by Brown, and Millais's *Pizarro Seizing the Inca of Peru*, or such precise titles as *A Huguenot, on St. Bartholomew's Day Refusing to Shield Himself from Danger by Wearing A Roman Catholic Badge*, also by Millais (Figs. 11-13).

With the last observation, the discussion enters what Wysłouch calls the prompting function. Titles with that function guide the viewer to perceive a painting in a specific way, the one indicated by the author.²² One can particularise the function further with *elucidating* titles – those that give the onlooker essential information as to what the work of art represents. Examples are numerous: Brown's *Waiting: An English Fireside of 1854-5*, Millais's *The Return of the Dove to the Arc* and *My First Sermon*, Rossetti's *Morning Music* and Wallis's *The Stonebreaker* (Figs. 14-18). In the last work, the identity (or rather the profession) of the male figure would be unknown without the aid of the title. In works like Collins's *Convent Thoughts*, Stanhope's *Thoughts of the Past*, Hunt's *Our English Coasts, 1852* and *Il Dolce Far Niente* (Figs. 1, 19-21), the title provides a necessary background or context in which the painting should be read; for instance, in *Our English Coasts, 1852*, the title forces the viewer to recognise “our English coasts” in a rural landscape. In this painting's case, it is also possible to distinguish another subfunction of the title, a focalising one, especially when one considers the other label, *Strayed Sheep*, which was attached to the work later on to avoid political controversy, and which altered the reading of the images considerably. The focalising function of the title appears also in Millais's *The Black Brunswicker* (Fig. 22) and in the already mentioned *A Huguenot...* in which works the title concentrates attention on the male figure. Likewise, in canvases showing a multitude of figures, out of which one is of primary importance, like Brown's *Chaucer at the Court of Edward III* (Fig. 23) and Millais's *Pizarro...*, the viewer's sight is focalised on the figures mentioned in the titles.²³ It is also viable to distinguish an opposite function, a de-focalising one, which can be isolated in, for instance, *The Pretty Baa-Lambs* by Brown, *Carlisle Wall* by Rossetti, and Millais's *Spring (Apple Blossoms)* (Figs. 24-26) where the viewer naturally focuses on the human figures in the foreground, while

²² Wysłouch, *Literatura a sztuki wizualne*, p. 143.

²³ It is worth noticing that in this case the focalising function coincides with the identifying feature of the title.

the title suggests that the background is the principal subject of the painting. These titles create a certain discrepancy with what is represented at the visual level, a clash with the spectator's expectations.

The last of Wysłouch's categories – in which the title is structurally integrated with the visual representation – is hard to find in traditional painting. Still, within the selection of Pre-Raphaelite works examined here, it can be represented by canvases more thoroughly discussed in the following sections. In *The Shadow of Death* by Hunt (Fig. 27), the title serves as a metaphor in the context of the visualized prefigurative image. In the case of *Before the Battle* by Rossetti (Fig. 28), the title adds a temporal perspective essential in interpretation. The list can be complemented with Millais's *No, Yes* and *Trust Me* (Figs. 29-31) as well as Brown's *Take Your Son, Sir* (Fig. 32) in which works a distinct verbal message is introduced to instigate the meaning. In fact, in all of the examples, a textualisation of the visual takes place: the significance of the painting relies on the verbal element of the title. To refer once again to Barthes' observations – the title *anchors* the meaning. Barthes's anchorage inverts, to an extent, the inherent domination of the painting over its title, and it is not, as Wysłouch asserts, that the title is "read later, as an attachment,"²⁴ on the contrary, it is often the primary guide to the reading of a painting. Actually, nothing in visual expression escapes the dictatorship of the word: the power of the word has long been recognised, alongside the power of naming: "[...] his name is his essence. Inseparable from his being,"²⁵ avows Jacques Derrida in his analysis of Shakespearean Romeo. In painting, labels motivate recognition and connotation, dictating interpretations.

II. THE PICTURE WITHIN AND BEYOND THE FRAME: LIMITS AND LIMITLESSNESS IN PRE-RAPHAELITE ART

To claim that a proper analysis of a painting should start with a scrutiny of its frame seems peculiar, yet not absurd; it is enough to quote a jocular observation by Gilbert K. Chesterton: "Art consists of limitation. The most beautiful part of every picture is the frame."²⁶ Borys Uspienski uses Chesterton's thought in his

²⁴ Wysłouch, *Literatura a sztuki wizualne*, p. 140.

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, "Aphorism countertime," in: *Jacques Derrida – Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York/London: Routledge, 1992), p. 426.

²⁶ *The Columbia World of Quotations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), [August 2005] <www.bartleby.com/66/>.

deliberations on the significance of setting the boundaries to paintings. The Russian semiotician claims that in order to see the world as a world of signs, it is necessary (although sometimes not sufficient) to set the boundaries at the outset as those specific boundaries create a picture.²⁷ Structurally speaking, limits allow the viewer to distinguish between internal and external points of view and to perceive an image as a certain whole, as a unit of artistic expression. In other words, frames mark the setting of a painted scene or view: what lies outside the frame does not belong to the scenery. Frames also set the beginning and the end of a narrative.²⁸ The frame can serve as a “narrative gesture”²⁹ in the same way as the expressions “once upon a time” and “and lived happily ever after” establish the narrative borders of fairy-tales. Taking into consideration the frames of a painting, the viewer finds it easy to locate the main figure, recognizes the background and the foreground and appreciates the elements that are only ornaments or minor adjuncts to the main focal point. It seems that the border is indispensable, for it is the frame that conditions the very existence of a work of art: “it *gives rise* to the work,” as Derrida announces in his discussion of frame as *parergon*.³⁰ Therefore, “the discourse on the frame”³¹ is similarly indispensable; it fulfils the requirement to distinguish between the internal and the external (the circumstance) and to describe the boundary that separates them:

No “theory,” no “practice,” no “theoretical practice” can intervene effectively in this field if it does not weigh up and bear on the frame, which is the decisive structure of what is at stake, at the invisible limit to (between) the interiority of meaning (put under shelter by the whole hermeneuticist, semioticist, phenomenologist, and formalist tradition) *and* (to) all the empiricism of the extrinsic which, incapable of either seeing or reading, miss the question completely.³²

Consequently, the leading quality and the peculiarity of the *parergonal* frame consists in its oscillation between the two spheres that it divides; it “stands out against two grounds, but with respect to each of those two grounds, it merges into the other.”³³

²⁷ Borys Uspieński, “Strukturalna wspólnota różnych rodzajów sztuki,” in: *Semiotyka kultury* [Semiotics of culture], eds. E. Janus i M.R. Mayenowa (Warszawa, PIW, 1977), p. 192.

²⁸ cf. Jurij Lotman, “O modelującym znaczeniu ‘końca’ i ‘początku’ w przekazach artystycznych (Tezy),” in: *Semiotyka kultury*, eds. E. Janus i M.R. Mayenowa (Warszawa, PIW, 1977), pp. 344-9.

²⁹ oryg. “gest narratorski,” Jerzy Ziomek, *Powinowactwa literatury* [The affinities of literature] (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1980), pp. 60-62.

³⁰ Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 9.

³¹ Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 45.

³² Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 61.

³³ Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 61.

Derrida's insistence on the existence of the frame/boundary does not mean that he accepts the definite wholeness and detachment of the work of art. On the contrary, with the assistance of the border, the French philosopher defies the text's homogeneity and its immunity to outside-the-frame influences; he needs "an edge" to subsequently deconstruct it and prove the intercourse of the inside and the outside of the text.³⁴ The interaction is conditioned by the frame which, in the process, "labours" and, consequently, like wood, "creaks and cracks, breaks down and dislocates."³⁵ Neither painterly nor literary texts can be seen as isolated, unified entities that are framed with the hardwood of finality; no literary narrative can be treated as a homogenous, unified and limited sphere in which time and space are fixed. Clearly, the frame is to be seen as perforated, eaten into by the woodworms of intertextuality and referentiality, but, nonetheless, it has to *be there*, or rather, it has to *be talked about*: "There is a frame, but the frame *does not exist*,"³⁶ as Derrida asserts.

In addition to being perforated by intertextuality and referentiality, the painterly text's frames are also punctured in other ways: for instance, by the self-reflexivity of images. This phenomenon manifests itself, for example, in the employment of such devices as a mirror within the frame of a painted scene; one of the most famous examples is Velazquez's *Las Meninas* (Fig. 33), a work which has been discussed in the context of artistic self-reflexivity by, for instance, Michael Foucault in *The Order of Things*.³⁷ Owing to the use of internal reflection within the frames, artists let the viewer see what the depicted figures see, creating in such a way a second narrative level or showing a view external to the frame. Within the Pre-Raphaelite painting *Take Your Son, Sir* by Ford Madox Brown is a perfect illustration of this practice: in the halo-like mirror behind the woman's figure, the viewer can actually see the man she is addressing. William Holman Hunt used the device in *Il Dolce far Niente*; in this picture, a seemingly meaningless image receives a hint of mystery through the reflection of the inside of the room with the fireplace and a barely noticeable human figure. The question that arises is whether those reflections actually *belong* to the space of the canvas. If so, what is achieved here is

³⁴ Wojciech Kalaga, *Nebulae of Discourse: Interpretation, Textuality and the Subject* (Frankfurt, Berlin, Bern, New York: Peter Lang Verlag, 1997), pp. 150-1.

³⁵ Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 75.

³⁶ Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 81.

³⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), pp 3-16.

an embedded narration contained in the frame of the mirror within the frame of the painting. An example of the crucial role of the frame-within-the-frame narrative is Rossetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* (Fig. 34), in which work the mirror intercepts the leading narrative line; the reflection reveals the essence of the foreground figure's, Lucrezia Borgia's, actions: she is washing her hands after poisoning her husband, duke Alfonso of Bisceglia, who, together with Pope Alexander VI, is reflected in the mirror behind her.³⁸ The whole story is disclosed only owing to the use of the second ground, the reflection; but for that, the painting would be devoid of an important part of its message.

A different way to communicate a self-referential message – also present in the famous example of self-referentiality in painting, *Las Meninas* – can be observed in Brown's *The Hayfield* (Fig. 35); the method consists in the inclusion of the figure of the artist within the space of the picture. Alongside the workers who are the subject of the painting, Brown places a painter who, as they are, is resting after his work; the result is a comparison of the farmers' and artists' work and a visual remark on the very act of painting. Rossetti's picture *Bottles* (Fig. 36) shows images of a few of the painter's tools (among them bottles with pigments) and an image of a half-ready painting (also enframed!) of a sleeping woman. It is quite clear that this painting-within-a-painting technique refers to the job of an artist as such; hence, it may rather be called a painting *about* painting. The above examples demonstrate that self-reflexivity, firstly, is not a modern invention and, secondly, it is not a phenomenon reserved for literature exclusively. In fact, self-reflexivity is an element uniting the arts, which W.J.T. Mitchell tries to prove in his analysis of the so-called "metapictures";³⁹ yet his argument is founded on a study of modern art. The Pre-Raphaelite works discussed above show that it is possible to apply this declaration of unity to 19th-century painting as well.

Frequently, artists reflect on the act of painting with a reference to the act of viewing; this can be discerned, for instance, in two works by Ford Madox Brown. The oval, eye-like shape of *An English Autumn Afternoon* implies the "authenticity" of the boundaries of human vision.⁴⁰ The viewer of the painting is being deceived

³⁸ H. C. Marillier, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Illustrated Memorial of his Life and Art* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1899), p. 105.

³⁹ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Visual and Verbal Representation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 36.

⁴⁰ Tim Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 67.

into thinking that he actually perceives the landscape through the eyes of the couple located in the foreground. The artist's other "optical experiment," *The Last of England* (Fig. 37), owing to its circular shape, focalises the view on a pair of figures, disregarding the rest of the company. This camera-eye technique suggests that the viewer's attention should be concentrated on this particular part of the scene. Considering the milieu, it is noticeable that the shape of the work simulates a telescope view, or, from a different perspective, it refers to the nature of human vision in another way: it is scientifically proved that the human eye can focus only on the centre of the visual field, leaving the peripheral regions unfocused.

The annulment of textual boundaries in painting can also be deduced from any outside-the-frame visual reference; i.e. in the case when an element of the interior of the framed space explicitly reaches outside the frame like, for example, in a situation when a figure's look reaches beyond the space visible to the viewer (this excludes cases where such a figure "looks back" at the viewer, which is a matter of a separate discussion). In Rossetti's *The Bower Meadow* (Fig. 38), the two women in the foreground direct their looks diagonally to the areas outside the frame and beyond the viewer's sight. This gesture suggests the complete absence of any limit to the scenery surrounding the figures. Likewise, in *A Girl at a Lattice* (Fig. 39), one can freely speculate as to what the girl is looking at, but one thing is clear: the target is situated outside the viewer's vision. Artists use such deceptive devices to make representation seemingly unbounded and to assure the viewer of an already obvious truth: that there *is* space outside the represented area. Still, the same truth makes the viewer realise another fact which is not so palpable: that the frames are transient or even superfluous. To return to Derrida's thought: borders *do not exist* but they *are there* because what is dealt with here is representation, not imitation, and this mode of artistic expression requires the establishment of a borderline between the represented and the not-represented in order to, paradoxically, prove the lack of any border.

The above argument implies that the artist has to make a certain choice in respect to the subject of representation or the topic of a narrative. In the case of many Pre-Raphaelite landscapes, the selection of a particular sector of the view to be painted is deceptively random. One may suspect that the artist chose that particular fragment on the basis of its appeal to the artist's eye; however, considering John Brett's *Val d'Aosta* (Fig. 40), Brown's *An English Autumn Afternoon* and Walton-on-

the-Naze (Fig. 41) or Millais's *A Waterfall in Glenfinlas* the choice is a conscious act of framing a view that includes particular elements such as a knitting woman or a sleeping girl; as a result, framing becomes a narrative device. Often, the presentation of a landscape is a pretext to reveal a specific detail: in Brett's *Stonebreaker* (Fig. 42), the glamorous background is overshadowed by the figure of the boy who is breaking stones. It is his story that becomes the focus of the viewer's attention: a story about the injustice of the English social system which exposes children to hard labour.

The act of enframing a particular view resembles photography: while taking photos, one chooses "the best" or "the most interesting" view, consciously creating a narrative within a snapshot. It is usually a choice out of an infinite area, which fact is also clear to the viewer of a developed photograph. Also in this case, thus, the boundaries of the picture disappear: the onlooker can easily guess what lies just outside the frame; hence, the artificial border becomes simply futile. The spectator of a painting can act likewise. It is clear that the sea, the mountains or the rainbow in a landscape simply continue beyond the frame; therefore, the frame's disappearance is conditioned by the viewer's imagination. This does not mean that those conjectures are completely frivolous; occasionally, particular complementary visions of the frame's exterior are guided by the elements of the interior. The interpenetration of the inside and the outside only validates the assumption of the border's perforation. The upper left corner of Hunt's *Our English Coasts, 1852* reveals a spatial frontier connected with the insular character of Great Britain. The image of the sharp land's end lapsing into the seemingly limitless sea is, however, disturbed seriously: the disturbance originates in the image of a barely noticeable steamer which can signify the oncoming invasion of the isle from the side of the French who "are there," in the assumed distance across the channel.

On the one hand, framing physically delimits and consequently reduces the perception of a work of art; on the other hand, it is also possible to consider painterly representation with an approach that neglects the existence of the frame: the conceptual lack of the frame, or at least its "perforation," opens an equally resourceful research field. The frame as a physical, but also a purely conceptual, boundary of a painting serves as a perfect reference point in the discussions of space in painting. Yet, the significance of the concept exceeds its status of a borderline, physical or abstract, between the "interior" and the "exterior." As it has been shown,

framing can also be employed in the discourses of self-reflexivity, narration and spectatorship, i.e. notions closely connected with *literary* theory. Moreover, the idea of the conceptual frame contributes to studies of visuality, optics and photography, extending thus its application to both forms of art.

III. THE NARRATIVE FEATURES OF VISUAL EXPRESSION – SPATIALITY AND TEMPORALITY IN PAINTING

Within the frame, an element which affects the structure of the narrative is the division of the visual into grounds. The play of the fore-, middle- and background has an effect resembling the interaction of the different levels of the narrative in a literary work. In general, the background of a painting can be compared to descriptive passages in prose or poetry that show varying importance, but such verbal accounts always provide a necessary piece of information for the reader to unify the interpretation of the work. The following, brief selection of examples will indicate other possible convergence points between the role of the background in literary and in visual texts.

As has been noted, in some Pre-Raphaelite landscapes, the background can be treated as a pretext to show the foreground figures. The human first plane naturally calls for a larger portion of the viewer's attention than the seemingly assistory natural background. However, the distant images can provide a necessary backdrop for the reading of the painting. In *Our English Coasts, 1852*, one is directed to perceive the scene as a piece of landscape painting, demonstrating the beauty of the land, but it is not *just* a landscape – there is a time and space limit in which the coast is to be seen in a peculiar context. Having gathered historical data, it is easy to combine the facts: the year 1852 brought Louis Napoleon Bonaparte's re-establishment of the French empire. His strong position and a genuine fear of invasion created a feeling of Britain's vulnerability at that time.⁴¹ Moreover, it is not *just* a piece of the English coastline either: as the painting site, Hunt chose a small village called Fairlight near Hastings,⁴² which – as Jonathan Ribner reveals – creates a historical allusion to the Norman invasion and generates a spatial connotation of the fear of invasion. On the

⁴¹ The painting has been read in this way by Jonathan P. Ribner in his article "*Our English Coasts, 1852, William Holman Hunt and Invasion of Fear at Midcentury*" where he thoroughly explains all the historical and political dimensions of the episode (Jonathan P. Ribner, "*Our English Coasts, 1852: William Holman Hunt and Invasion Fear at Midcentury*," *Art Journal* 55.2 (1996), *Questia*, Nov. 2004, <<http://www.questia.com/>>.)

⁴² Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 63.

whole, this particular reading suggests an interpretation based on national feelings, alluding to Hunt's alleged patriotism and showing his concern with the country's well-being. Similarly, an air of "Englishness," tradition and history surfaces in Brown's *Walton-on-the-Naze*, in which secondary, but significant, images from the background suggest the work's historical meaning:

Here there are more obvious symbols of English history: the Naze Tower beacon of 1720, a lighthouse warning the merchant marine away from the shore, can be seen to the left, catching the pink of the sunset; a Martello tower, built in 1810-12 for the defence of England against Napoleonic invasion, appears to the right of the composition, evidently still in use and surmounted by the British flag.⁴³

The elements of the background can, therefore, "move forward" in interpretations, ceasing to serve as negligible picture space fillers. While in *Our English...* the background has to be accompanied by the year appearing in the title to guide the historical interpretation, in *Walton-on-the-Naze* the onlooker immediately combines the details of the milieu in a unity that triggers a historical reading.

The similarity between the narrative levels of painterly and literary works extends also to phenomena specific to verbal texts only, such as embedded narratives. The notion of narrative-within-narrative appeared in the discussion of the painting containing images of mirrors; a similar device that disrupts the homogeneity of the storyline is the image of a window composing the background. The view outside the window in *The Shadow of Death* introduces an alien ambiance into the general atmosphere of a religious experience in household surroundings; the natural beauty of the garden outside has an other-worldly effect. The ships outside the window in *Thoughts of the Past* direct the interpretation towards the lady's occupation and the possible direction of the flow of her thoughts.

A. THE NARRATIVE SITUATION

To analyse narration in a painting, one needs to identify the voice of the narrative, the "speaker" who carries it forward. The narrative situation in literary works becomes evident, for instance, through the occurrence of personal pronouns and inflection forms. Revealing the *identity* of the voice of a poem is yet a different matter: the reader has to struggle through multiple meanings to get to the speaker's self. Such a procedure seems to be redundant in visual interpretation: in most cases,

⁴³ Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 71.

one automatically identifies the “speaker” with the painter – the one who tells the story with the images he chose to include in a work of art. Such third-person narration is, however, not the only type of “story-telling” in painting. An important distinction that has to be made is the one between the narrative voice and the narrative perspective. In literary theory, the problem was rationalized by Gérard Genette, who introduced the term “focaliser” to avoid the confusion connected with terms like: “narrator,” “point of view” and “perspective,” as well as to differentiate between “the one who speaks” and “the one who perceives.”⁴⁴ Genette’s distinction has been quite convincingly adapted to visual arts by Mieke Bal in one of her articles. This critic compares there the usual functions of the literary and the visual focaliser; the comparison shows that the term can be used with the same results in both discourses.⁴⁵

Landscape painting seems to be least obscure in terms of the narrative situation. In works like *Our English Coasts, 1852* or Inchbold’s *A Study in March* (Fig. 43), the narrator clearly stays outside and relates the events, which can only be treated as omniscient, third-person narration and a case of external focalisation. The obvious reason for that is the lack of human figures within the frames of the works; the matter gets more intricate when such a figure actually enters the visible space. *Val d’ Aosta* and *A Waterfall in Glenfinlas* each include a human figure in the foreground; still, it is hard to treat those agents as narrators as they are involved in activities suggesting their absence in terms of active narration (the girl is sleeping and the woman is knitting); they are rather characters in a story told by an external narrator. *An English Autumn Afternoon* and *Walton-on-the-Naze* include characters observing the same scenery that is perceived by the viewer of the painting, which connects them to the role of an external narrating subject. However, at the same time, they are situated *in* the view and, consequently, in the story, so their point of view coincides with an internal character’s perspective; therefore, those figures can be treated as character-focalisers of internal focalisation. In *The Hayfield*, the artist can actually be seen in the foreground, which produces an intriguing, self-reflective presentation of the narrator as the painter, but also a narrator who takes part in the story and reports in the first person.

⁴⁴ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), pp. 189-194.

⁴⁵ Mieke Bal, “Reading the Gaze: The Construction of Gender in ‘Rembrandt’,” in: *Vision and Textuality*, ed. Stephen Melville (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 158-160.

It is also possible for the viewer to assume a figural perspective and read the story through the eyes of a character, as takes place in modernist novels. The point of view can also be strongly repositioned in the narrative frame of a painting. It is easy to point to many dialogues between figures in a picture that seem to be reported by an external viewer/narrator; yet, in each of them the focaliser can be identified with the characters represented. Examples are *A Street Scene in Cairo: The Lantern Maker's Courtship* by Hunt, *The Black Brunswicker*, *Yes, Trust Me* by Millais, Rossetti's *Annunciation* (Fig. 44) and a few more Pre-Raphaelite paintings in which an act of conversation is represented and whose verbal manifestation could be a dialogue or a conversation including more speakers.

Monologic utterances or internal monologues are also achievable in painting. The nun in *Convent Thoughts* ponders the beauty of nature represented by the flower which she is holding in her hand, but at a deeper level she is immersed in what is represented in the image of her other hand – the one holding a missal – and in her attire; in short, one can interpret her monologue as vacillation between religion and nature. In *Thoughts of the Past*, the girl is re-examining her recent past with a feeling of regret and disgrace. Her mental state can be deduced from the accessories visible in the picture: the gloves and a walking stick as well as the locale of her apartment, a shipyard, which details hint at male presence prior to the moment captured in the image. However, the male figure has disappeared and, as Prettejohn notices, looking at the painting,

the viewer's attention is thus drawn more exclusively to the female figure's psychology. Stray signs of the 'fallen woman' theme persist: the torn curtain, cracked window pane, and sickly plant suggest that the woman has fallen on hard times, consequent on her previous 'fall' from sexual virtue. Yet we cannot tell whether the woman has abandoned, or been abandoned by, her lover, or even whether she repents; although she looks out of the picture her expression is unfathomable, and her gesture of brushing her hair suggests an absorption in herself.⁴⁶

The "absorption in herself" of the woman is crucial for the monologue-oriented reading of the painting.

Other Pre-Raphaelite works of art that show situations in which the central figure engages in an internal monologue are Millais's *Yes or No* and *The Bridesmaid* (Figs. 45-6) as well as Brown's *Waiting: An English Fireside of 1854-5* and

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2000), p. 218.

Cromwell on His Farm. One could add countless examples to the list, but what makes the enumerated paintings especially valuable for the present discussion is the presence of a clue that can lead to the topic of the depicted figures' inner thoughts and guide the interpretation. Otherwise, any portrait or portrait-like representation of a human being could be analysed in terms of the ongoing internal experiences of the figure, thus turning such studies into mere speculations. The hint may be provided by an element of ornament, a symbolic detail, or the title, and that is why a painting like Rossetti's *Reverie* does not qualify for the list: here the topic is hard to determine except for the hint in the title which, however, only reveals the premeditated general subject of the representation. In Millais's *The Bridesmaid*, the significant clue is the fact that the female figure is "a bridesmaid who is passing the wedding cake through the ring nine times,"⁴⁷ as the artist himself explains. This act, a Victorian wedding custom, was aimed at ensuring a vision of her future lover; thus, as Pointon assumes, it signifies a fantasy about sexual consummation.⁴⁸ The combination of the gesture with the symbolism of the orange blossom at her breast which is a sign of chastity, the clouds of hair and the phallic sugar caster⁴⁹ results in a very strong sexual message radiating from the painting. This message comes from *within* the figure's mind, but the viewer – equipped with the informative peripheralia – almost participates in the vision the woman is having.

In *Waiting: An English Fireside of 1854-5*, the allusions to the father of the family (a pile of letters, and a miniature portrait on the table) and the visage of the child – clearly stricken with an illness – distort the apparent Victorian idyll and make the reader distrust the calmness of the sewing mother: the flow of her thoughts cannot be unruffled.⁵⁰ Even if the viewer is deceived by the apparent cosiness of the fireplace and the typically Victorian image of the woman – a domesticated mother, performing her household duties – the details signifying distress and longing reveal a completely different reading of the woman's mental state. Millais's *No* and *Stella* can also be "read" as inner monologues; in both works, what facilitates interpretation is the image of a letter which has just been read by the women present in the view. The

⁴⁷ John Guille Millais, *The Life and Letters of Sir John Everett Millais* (London: Methuen, 1899), vol.1, p. 94.

⁴⁸ Marcia Pointon, "Histories of Matrimony: J. E. Millais," in: *Pre-Raphaelites Reviewed*, ed. Marcia Pointon (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 115; Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 92.

⁴⁹ Pointon, "Histories of Matrimony: J. E. Millais," p. 115.

⁵⁰ The child is portrayed in an unnatural – "cadaverous," according to Barringer – position with the visible blood-like effect on its robe; Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 91.

news included in the correspondence pervades the figure's reflections at this particular moment, while in *Yes or No* it is the picture of the beloved that creates the thought of longing that materialises on the woman's morose face. Those story-telling peripheralia make the messages of the paintings unified and coherent; in fact, instead of being pure ornaments, they become inherent signs co-determining the interpretation of an image.

The function of ornamentation is connected with the issue of focus and periphery in works of art. The physically indicated focal points of paintings normally serve as the centres of narration: a human figure placed against the natural or ornamental background stands for the core of the narrative. Yet in multi-figure portrayals, the matter becomes more complicated: the viewer's task is to distinguish the leading characters from the extras. Needless to say, the task may be more difficult than in literary narratives where the amount of attention devoted to a certain figure or the focus on an event clearly indicates who/what the lead is. Such a structural division corresponds to the foreground-background partition in painting or to the spatial centralisation of certain images. This does not apply, however, to works in which groups of functionally equivalent figures are displayed, like Hunt's *May Morning on Magdalen Tower* (Fig. 47), Brown's *Work*, Millais's *Spring* or Burne-Jones's *Green Summer* (Fig. 48); in such cases, the importance of a specific figure is superfluous. As to inanimate peripheries, their usual function is cooperation (sometimes essential) in the creation of meaning; the significant details mentioned in the previous paragraph demonstrate that fact. For Kant, and for Derrida, who deconstructs *The Third Critique*, ornamentation is another type of *parergon* which, like the frame, is a supplement inherent in the beauty of the work of art and enters into a constant interplay with the work (*ergon*) itself:

Even what is called ornamentation (*parerga*), i.e., what is only an adjunct and not an intrinsic constituent in the complete representation of the object, in augmenting the delight of taste does so only by means of its form. Thus it is with the frames of pictures or the drapery on statues, or the colonnades of palaces. But if the ornamentation does not itself enter into the composition of the beautiful form – if it is introduced like a gold frame merely to win approval for the picture by means of its charm – it is then called finery and takes away from the genuine beauty.⁵¹

⁵¹ quoted in: Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 53.

B. LEVELS OF VISUAL NARRATIVES

As previously stated, what brings painting closer to poetry is the necessity of the background constituents for a visual narrative act to be fully meaningful; this conclusion is especially compelling when the background includes human characters. While in any narrative, there is a line of interference between particular *personae*, in Pre-Raphaelite paintings there are figures that can be treated as characters in a story whose function is rarely purely decorative. In *The Bower Meadow*, one can distinguish several levels of narration: if one associates the narrative levels with human figures present in the view, the levels can be connected with the two women playing, two dancing and the woman in the background. The assumed unity of the work is distorted by the dispersal of the narrative: on occasion, figures gathered in the view seem to belong to completely different “stories.” In *Green Summer and Spring*, each of the female figures present in the view can assume narrative dominance and serve as the focaliser of interpretation; in *The Last of England*, the foreground couple clearly represents a different narrative than the surrounding company. Some divisions in the narrative structure derive from stronger dissimilarities and contrasts. Brett’s *Stonebreaker*, for instance, shows a disparity between the boy’s hard labour and the natural playfulness of childhood – represented by the playing dog – that *should be* the boy’s occupation.⁵² In Millais’s *The Blind Girl* (Fig. 49), the two sisters’ perception is totally dissimilar: whereas the little girl is admiring the natural beauty of the surroundings, the elder contemplates her inability to experience the sensory world. A similar disconnection appears in *The Mill* by Edward Burne-Jones (Fig. 50), where the foreground women form a narrative completely detached from the one represented by the workers in the background.

In some cases, the narrative levels grow to larger numbers. The most illustrative and convincing example is Brown’s *Work*: under the surface of the bipolar division of society, signalled in the painting, more narratives emerge. They are associated with the particular members of the amalgamation of figures: the Member of Parliament on horseback, the immigrant family on the grassy bank, the intellectuals on the right, the orphans, the street urchins, the orange seller and the workers in the centre, to name only a part of the company.⁵³ What is curious about

⁵² Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 240.

⁵³ Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 234.

the picture is the spatial hierarchy of importance in the arrangement of the characters: from the most influential at the top, to the orphans and immigrants who are placed literally *below* the others.⁵⁴ Such a multitude of figures and actions creates a dispersal of the narrative line, a fragmentation, which makes representations like Brown's a visual counterpart of modern literary patchwork structures of narration.

C. VISUAL TEMPORALITY

The inappropriateness of Lessing's distinction between the arts, his calling poetry a temporal art and painting, spatial, has already been proved; yet, the employment of Pre-Raphaelite art is especially useful in such critiques.⁵⁵ Mitchell refutes Lessing's division by pointing out that it is based on "a slender thread of the difference between primary and secondary representation, direct and indirect expression"⁵⁶ and by proving that the time-space attribution of the arts can operate only at the first, "direct" level of representation. The German theorist assigned "bodies" as objects of painting and "actions" as subjects of painting, admitting however – which to Mitchell is a "strategic concession" – that "painting can imitate actions also, but only as they are suggested through forms," and symmetrically, that "poetry describes also bodies, but only indirectly through actions." The essence of Mitchell's critique is a rhetorical question as to whether there is a sign that works "indirectly." If one treated Lessing's "direct" expression literally, the whole idea of representation would have to be abolished: "direct" expression would have to imply that "the bodies or actions are simply present before us in painting or poetry."⁵⁷ The conclusion is that the distinction between directness and indirectness is "not a difference of kind, but one of degree,"⁵⁸ the degree of effort put into a work of art to make it able to express actions (in painting) and to express bodies (in poetry); actually, such a deduction can be found in passages from Lessing quoted above.⁵⁹

Time is not only "visible" in painting but also of primary significance in painterly representations of the perceptible world. Works like Rossetti's *Morning*

⁵⁴ Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 234. Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, pp. 98-103.

⁵⁵ E. Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay Upon the Limits of Poetry and Painting*, trans. E. Frothingham (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 1766), p. 91; quoted in W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 100-4; and Wendy Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 50.

⁵⁶ Mitchell, *Iconology*..., p. 101.

⁵⁷ Mitchell, *Iconology*..., p. 101.

⁵⁸ Mitchell, *Iconology*..., p. 102.

⁵⁹ Mitchell, *Iconology*..., p. 102.

Music, May Morning on Magdalen Tower and *Our English Coasts, 1852* by Hunt point to the time setting of a particular scene in an obvious manner; still, it is not only the title of the work that situates the narrative in a particular time perspective. The image of a woman in *Morning Music* indicates the time of day in the act of her combing her hair and the half-awake, dreamy look in the woman's eyes. In Rossetti's *Risen at Dawn* (Fig. 51), even without the hint of the title, the viewer is likely to admit that the loose, half-removed garment of the female figure denotes the fact that she has just risen from the bed. Hunt's *May Morning on Magdalen Tower* records the Oxford custom of greeting the sun on a May Morning with hymns from Magdalen Tower. The artist captures the specificity of the ritual and the state of nature at this particular moment of the year and of the day as also happens in *An English Summer Afternoon*, where the landscape is shown as a "representative" October afternoon in the suburbs of London. As it seems, it is the specificity of time that the artist emphasizes, not the particularities of space. In *Our English Coasts, 1852*, the viewer is likewise directed to perceive the scene as a piece of landscape painting, but he is given a time limit in which the coast is to be seen – in the year 1852, which contextualises the view and sets a historical background. What is important for the modern onlooker is the chronological delimitation of the painting's meaning: it is the English coast in the year 1852, not in any other. A functionally similar historical fixture of time appears in *Cromwell on His Farm*: it becomes apparent due to the presence of a historical character on the canvas. Other, less obvious, time-anchors of paintings are visible in *Spring*, where the particular time of year is marked by the flowers on apple trees that appear in springtime. In Millais's *Autumn Leaves* (Fig. 52), the season manifests itself very strongly in the natural images of leaves that have fallen off the trees, the act of piling them up by the girls and in the general mood of the painting referring to usual autumn weather. Similarly, in *Green Summer*, the season is emphasized by the rich foliage of trees that soaks the view in a dark shade of green.

The examples presented thus far do not prove, however, that time can be manifested in painting in terms of its narrative passage. The anchoring of a painted scene to a concrete time period or time point does not make painting a temporal art, uniting visual and verbal arts. What does help overcome the temporal limits of painting is the phenomenon called "the pregnant moment." According to Wendy Steiner, it is an isolated "moment in the action that revealed all that had led up to it

and all that would follow.”⁶⁰ It is quite clear that such a reference to action by means of a still moment involved in it is nothing more than a sequential reporting of events, a narrative situation. A typical narration – a relation of past actions – can be read in Stanhope’s *Thoughts of the Past*; as has been mentioned before, the woman portrayed here is reflecting on her past deeds, whose nature surfaces in the accessories visible around her. The woman’s inner monologue hovers around a prior male presence, the aim of which, as it may be suspected, was obtaining sexual services. As Prettejohn suggests, she is not only fallen from sexual grace but also from past prosperity, which is visible in the shattered look of the dwelling place.⁶¹ A monologue, of an unknown subject, however, is represented in Rossetti’s *Reverie*: the combination of the title and the expression on the woman’s face assures the viewer that the painting is a sign of a past action: she is undergoing a flashback dreamily recalled in her mind. In Wallis’s *The Stonebreaker*, the present is shown as being a natural consequence of what happened prior to the scene that is depicted: judging by the sunset lighting, the man is probably resting after a day of hard work; hence, it is the result that makes the spectator imagine the past, to supplement the visible with the rest of the story.

The opposite direction of time references in terms of chronology is also attainable in painting. The foreshadowing of future events is quite clearly signified in Rossetti’s *Annunciation*, a typical prefigurative image that shows the moment at which Mary learns about her future fate from Archangel Gabriel; an additional indicator of Mary’s future sainthood is the aureoled dove. In *The Black Brunswicker*, the mood of grief on the soldier’s and his beloved’s face is an allusion to his future lot. The clear historical reference allows the viewer to believe that the man is going to risk his life in the war; accordingly, the narrative reports his hurried departure and the possibility of coming death.⁶² *Before the Battle* conveys an almost identical message: the woman is fastening a banner to the knight’s spear preparing him for the battle, and the emerging feeling is that of the inevitable danger awaiting the knight. In Millais’s *Waiting* (Fig. 53) and *The Bridesmaid*, the imminent manifests itself in a

⁶⁰ Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric*, p. 40.

⁶¹ Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 218.

⁶² “A corps of 700 volunteer hussars under the command of Frederick William, Duke of Brunswick, who had been forbidden by Napoleon to succeed to his father’s dukedom. They were called “Black” because they wore mourning for the deceased Duke. Frederick William fell at Quatre-Bras, 1815. One of Millais’s best pictures is called “The Black Brunswicker.” In: Brewer, E. Cobham. “[Black Brunswickers].” *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. Philadelphia: Henry Altemus, 1898; *Bartleby.com*, January 2000, <www.bartleby.com/81/>.

more concealed way: the portrayed women are expecting a meeting with their beloved men. In the case of the latter work, the bride is foreshadowing a future sexual encounter – here “the now” of the frame of the narrative has almost lost its importance: she is first and foremost anticipating the near future. The temporal situation in *Waiting* is similar: the act of waiting itself essentially repositions the female figure into the future; this is emphasised by Millais’s visualization of the figure’s present behaviour as passive and insignificant.

A natural time perspective for visual representation emerges in reports of the very moments of capturing scenes, as occurs in a photograph arresting a point in time. The accounts of an activity in progress give painterly works a sense of immediacy in their perception, an impression that the painting actually renders a momentary action or, in narrative terms, relates the events in the present continuous tense. Brown’s *Work*, Millais’s *The Rescue* and Brett’s *The Hedger* (Fig. 54) illustrate such an approach; the depictions stress the active performance of a task and the anteriority-posterity perspective may be, thus, excluded from their interpretations. To a lesser extent, although still significantly, the continuous present is shown in works like, for instance, *Green Summer or Spring*. These depictions have a more sedate character: no dynamic activity is being performed, which overshadows the effect of an incident in action.

Both poetry and painting are able to convey images of experiences that are excluded from the notion of the passage of time: timeless incidents in which the temporal dimension disappears. The groupings of the female figures in *The Bower Meadow* and *The Mill* are hovering in ritualistic dances and seem to disregard the passing of time. In *The Mill*, as John Dixon Hunt explains, “the three damozels are caught in mid-dance and (Giorgione-like) the fourth trails her fingers across the musical instrument, our sense of the momentarily held vision is slight if, indeed, present at all. They move rather abstracted from life, stately and meditative, but subject to passing time neither in their world nor the artist’s.”⁶³ The little girls in Millais’s *Leisure Hours* (Fig. 55) enjoy their childhood idleness and although the title suggests that this state is temporary (if one treats leisure hours as opposed to the hours of occupation), the assumption that they come from an affluent family implies that leisureliness is simply their permanent condition. The woman in *Il Dolce far*

⁶³ John Dixon Hunt, “A Moment’s Monument: Reflections on Pre-Raphaelite Vision in Poetry and Painting,” in: *Pre-Raphaelitism*, ed. James Sambrook (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 260.

Niente has the benefit of idleness too; as the title suggests, she is soaked in a happy state and she is taking much pleasure from it. *The Vale of Rest* by Millais (Fig. 56) is an ambiguous example of the temporality question: the setting, the relaxed atmosphere and the lack of haste in the nuns' activity indicate timelessness and deny the importance of time going by. However, what looms in the painting as the primary message is the theme of death's inevitability; the images of digging a grave and the church in the background produce a *memento mori* for the viewer. The artist managed to produce here an equivocal message in the leisurely manner of the action, on the one hand, and the hastiness connected with the fear of oncoming death, on the other hand.

One more usage of time in narrative terms can be mentioned at the closure of this section: in a pair of Millais's paintings titled *My First Sermon* (Fig. 16) and *My Second Sermon* (Fig. 57), the viewer can observe a comic-book like development of action. In the first work, the girl is clearly moved by the fact that she is participating in a religious meeting for the first time; she behaves appropriately and keeps her attire in perfect order. The succeeding painting shows the same girl in the church for the second time; during this visit, the girl has taken her hat off and fallen asleep. The juxtaposition of the two situations has a humorous effect that is achieved mainly owing to the chronological progress of the visual scenes.

As the above examples show, causality and chronology – basic features of literary narration – can be easily distinguished and identified in painterly representation. The past and the future are clearly indicated as well as the continuity of the present; the specific mood of timelessness brings visual images closer to airy description in poetry. In addition, the flashbacks and foreshadowings make the painterly depictions modern: the use of such techniques used in visual works goes along with progressive developments in literary narrative techniques.

IV. ELEMENTS OF POETIC STYLE IN PAINTING: RHETORICAL FIGURES, MOOD- AND EMOTION-SETTING

A. METAPHORICAL EXPRESSION IN PAINTING

Figures and tropes are the basic stylistic tools that distinguish the poeticity of a verbal utterance from other, more common uses of language. However, it is an established opinion that these figures – metaphors, parallelisms, irony, etc. – appear

in other discourses as well; everyday common language is filled with figures of speech⁶⁴ – does that mean that it is “poetic”? Jakobsonian “literariness” has long been reassessed, and doubt has been cast on the exclusiveness of figurative language to poetry.⁶⁵ Still, since the theme of the argument is the dichotomy of the poetic and the painterly, not that of the poetic and the non-poetic, figurative language as it appears in poetry will be mainly referred to in the following section. More specifically, the argument will focus on the manifestations of poetic rhetorical devices in painterly representation.

At the outset, it is important to do away with questions like “Can a metaphor be seen?”⁶⁶ which has been asked and answered negatively by Mieczysław Porębski, Maria Renata Mayenowa and Jerzy Ziomek⁶⁷ on the basis of the false understanding of what Peirce called “iconic signs.” The idea of “resemblance” in iconicity has been reassessed by, for example, Umberto Eco, who came to the conclusion that it is not in question whether a sign *resembles* its object in any way; iconic signs represent the object through a code which, as any other, has to be learned and through conventions that have to be recognized.⁶⁸ Seweryna Wysłouch has proven that a visual metaphor is achievable through the “strengthening of conventionality” and “reducing referentiality.”⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the critic excludes realistic painting from her research and bases her argument on Polish modern art and on abstract painting which includes “visible” metaphors: the ones that *indeed* can actually be seen due to the deformation of the expected – as in Dali’s *Persistence of Memory* (Fig. 58) – or through a shift in connotation – as in Hasior’s *Wyszywanie charakteru* (Fig. 59).⁷⁰ Therefore, “shifts,” “enforcements” and “reductions”⁷¹ of connotation are the mechanisms that produce metaphors; in this light, the issue of the *visuality* of metaphor becomes redundant. The problem in question is whether metaphor is successfully constructed by the

⁶⁴ as thoroughly elucidated in the momentous theoretical work on this subject: George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

⁶⁵ Terry Eagleton, “What is Literature?” in: *Literary Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 6.

⁶⁶ The title of M. Porębski’s article in “Teksty,” no. 6 (1980) in which the author rejects the possibility of visualizing a metaphor on the basis of the division of a work of art into a denotative level and a connotative one; according to Porębski, metaphor is not possible on the denotative level.

⁶⁷ Wysłouch, *Literatura a sztuki wizualne*, p. 64.

⁶⁸ Umberto Eco, *Nieobecna struktura* [The absent structure] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo KR, 2003), p. 127.

⁶⁹ Wysłouch, *Literatura a sztuki wizualne*, pp. 63-77.

⁷⁰ Wysłouch, *Literatura a sztuki wizualne*, p. 146.

⁷¹ Wysłouch, *Literatura a sztuki wizualne*, p. 67-68; 76-77.

viewer; in other words, the connotations have to be recognised and the viewer has to reach the point at which “obviousness ends, and metaphor arises.”⁷²

Even a superficial glance at Pre-Raphaelite art assures the viewer that metaphorical readings of that type of painting are viable. To point to one of the most obvious examples, Millais’s work *Autumn Leaves* is instantly, and unfortunately too cursorily, regarded as deeply figurative: “It has no narrative, no action: static, decorative but monumental, the whole composition serves as a metaphor for autumn itself.”⁷³ Indeed, but such an effortless interpretation denies any metaphorical value to the painting: verging on triviality, the critic proclaims the obvious, or else just follows the viewer’s expectations as to what a painting entitled *Autumn Leaves* could represent. A counterbalance of such readings can be found in the already presented interpretation of Hunt’s *Our English Coasts, 1852*: the one in which the coastal landscape with sheep on the cliff alludes to the current situation in England.

The basic definition of metaphor assumes a shift from a literal to a figurative meaning. In *Stages of Cruelty* by Brown (Fig. 60), one can discover both meanings or even actually witness the *production* of a metaphor. The lower part of the painting reveals a child beating a dog, whereas, in the upper region, one can see a man making advances at a hesitating woman. The “cruelty” in the title appears in its literal meaning in the image of the child and achieves a metaphorical one in the other woman’s resistance. The juxtaposition of the images contextualises the concept of cruelty sufficiently to make it metaphorical; simultaneously, the painting *explains* the metaphor that it includes. Normally, the cruelty of a reluctant lover does not have to be understood figuratively, but in the context given by the painter, it has to, because the literal meaning of the word is supplied in the image of the child. The example shows that visual metaphors in realistic painting are achievable; moreover, in a self-reflexive way, it shows *how* they can be created.

Paintings reveal metaphors included in them but they can also holistically undergo figurative readings; an example of that quality can be found in Hunt’s *Afterglow in Egypt* (Fig. 61), and again, the source for such a reading originates in the verbal part – the title. The image of a Beduin woman equipped with “symbols of colonial plenty”⁷⁴ can be interpreted as a manifestation of the opulence of the natural

⁷² “Metafora zaczyna się tam, gdzie kończy się dosłowność.” Edward Balcerzan, “Metafora a interpretacja,” *Teksty* [Texts], no. 6 (1980), p. 38; also quoted in: Wysłouch, *Literatura a sztuka wizualna*, p. 76.

⁷³ Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 139.

⁷⁴ Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 120.

goods of Egypt or as a symbolic representation of the Egyptian goddess of harvest, as Barringer reads it. Yet the critic also mentions the fact that “the figure was understood as by one critic as a symbol of the collapse of Egyptian culture.”⁷⁵ Looking at the representation in the context of a visual message, one has to say that it is not actually a symbol but a metaphor of the collapse: this is so mainly due to the ambiguity of the title. The word “afterglow” bears several meanings that can be associated with what is seen in the painting – from the primary meaning of “sunset” to one that in this context is deeply metaphorical – “A lingering impression of past glory or success”⁷⁶ – in which the theme of collapse sounds strongly. To go further with the metaphorical associations of the painting, “afterglow” is also “[t]he comfortable feeling following a pleasant experience.” Bearing in mind the sexual appeal of the female figure, stressed by Barringer, the connotations of “pleasant experience” transfer the interpretation of the painting to completely different regions. On the whole, the metaphorical message(s) of this particular work is, as has been revealed, strongly guided by the linguistic potential of the title, but – as the ensuing examples will show – the verbal ingredient is not a necessary condition for the appearance of figurative readings.

A prefigurative metaphor of Hunt’s *The Shadow of Death* rests in the reallocation of the meanings attached to a carpenter’s tools and in presenting them as the implements used in crucifixion. The shadow on the wall clearly resembles the figure of Christ on the cross; the position of the tools which are hung on the wall coincides with the shadow’s wrists imitating the image of crucifixion. The title, verbally metaphorical, points to the visual metaphor of the painting; however, even without the aid of the title, it is possible to notice the figurative meaning of the image. What is responsible for the generation of the metaphor is the transfer of the associations connected with the depicted objects: from the commonplace to the sacred, or otherwise, from the human to the divine. As Hunt explained, he was trying to “domesticise”⁷⁷ Christ in this painting; the result shows his failure, though: the picture “ripostes” by clearly alluding to Christ’s holiness. The juxtaposition of the hard-working boy and the playful dog in Brett’s *Stonebreaker* also results in a

⁷⁵ Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 120.

⁷⁶ Pickett, Joseph P. et al. eds. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980), [“afterglow”].

⁷⁷ George P. Landow, “The Shadow of Death,” *Replete With Meaning: William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, in: *The Victorian Web*, ed. George P. Landow, August 2005, <<http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/whh/replete/shadow.html>>.

metaphorical message that is not necessarily conditioned by the verbal label: the dog's playfulness represents the condition that ought to be characteristic of a child. Instead, the boy is forced to labour, in this way, being deprived of the state enjoyed by the accompanying animal; that is to say, the metaphor of the painting consists in the displacement of the characteristic features usually attached to a represented element.

B. VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF OTHER RHETORICAL FIGURES

The importance, but also the generality, of metaphor as “the figure of figures”⁷⁸ is unquestionable; still, to make the argument more specialised, let us point to examples which will show that it is possible to distinguish other, more specific, figures and tropes in visual representation. It is not the aim of this discussion to create a list of possible rhetorical figures used in poetry and provide counterparts for them from the body of Pre-Raphaelite painting – not that this is possible in view of the purely linguistic character of some of these figures. However, the cases gathered below show that such an analysis is, first of all, possible and, secondly, that it contributes to the discussion of poetry-painting proximity. The figures present in painting naturally cannot be as clear-cut as in verbal expression; therefore, the definitions of the *visual* rhetorical figures require a certain approximation.

Consequently, the traditional understandings of a pair of figures based on the concept of opposition and incongruity, i.e., antithesis and oxymoron, will merge into one concept of “a juxtaposition of contrasting ideas or terms”; such a combination appears in a few Pre-Raphaelite paintings. An antithetical juxtaposition of nature and religion occurs in *Convent Thoughts*: the positioning of signs indicating the two concepts – the missal in one hand and the flower in the other – and the supposed hesitation between them expressed in the figure of the nun suggest a confrontation rather than a mere comparison of ideas. Another juxtaposition that can be noticed in this painting is the one between nature and art, represented by the colourful depictions in the missal, which shows “primitive” versions of Biblical themes; as Prettejohn suggests, the picture “asks us to [...] to compare the medieval artist's work with the natural beauty of the garden.”⁷⁹ A clash that produces a similar effect is incorporated in the structure of *Walton-on-the-Naze*. The background of the

⁷⁸ Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 189.

⁷⁹ Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 63.

painting contains images of a town and a village: a combination of rusticity and urbanity which results in a contrast used as a stylistic stratagem to create an almost “antipicteresque” statement, as Barringer has it, in which the natural is compromised by modernity.⁸⁰ One more example of antithetical structures in painting is Brown’s *Work*. Here, it is the dichotomy of the working class and the aristocracy that can be distinguished in the amalgamation of figures; hard labour being attached to the lower class of the society whereas a patronizing, relaxed lifestyle is associated with the upper classes.

A stronger feeling of inappropriateness comes forth in the figure of oxymoron. The visual version of the device can be found in the placement of an element of a painting’s structure in a way that makes such a positioning appear strange, out of place or, at least, unusual. Examples of the procedure in Pre-Raphaelite work are numerous; the sickly looking child in the idyllic Victorian environment of *Waiting: An English Fireside of 1854-5* is one of them. The curious placing of a child beating a dog with a branch next to a couple clearly participating in an amorous tête-à-tête in *Stages of Cruelty* looks at least surprising, while the image of books on a blind girl’s lap in Millais’s painting produces a strong feeling of the oddity verging on cruelty of such a combination. That feeling is moreover enhanced by the antithetical relation of blindness to the visible beauty of nature. As to Brown’s work, critics have tried to decipher the idea behind the composition, pointing to a parallel between the woman’s cruelty in rejecting the advancer and the literal meanness of the child.⁸¹ An intriguing example of the oxymoronic positioning of an image in the structure of a painting is presented in Hunt’s *Shadow of Death*. The image of Christ in the position of crucifixion is put against the background of a domestic milieu (a carpenter’s workshop) and a natural image outside the window. The viewer’s expectations, drawn from the visual tradition, sway towards a more “likely” backdrop of such an image of sanctity; Hunt’s placing “great importance upon the labouring humanity of Christ”⁸² brings evidently oxymoronic effects.

Bizarre outcomes are also generated by the images of animals included in Pre-Raphaelite paintings; to mention a few instances: a swine and a sheep placed underneath Cromwell’s horse in the foreground of *Cromwell on His Farm*; the dog

⁸⁰ Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 70.

⁸¹ Timothy Hilton, *The Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), p. 156.

⁸² Landow, “The Shadow of Death.”

wearing a hat (!) next to the couple in *A Street Scene in Cairo: The Lantern Maker's Courtship*; the flock of sheep in Hunt's *Our English Coasts, 1852* (considering the original title, of course, as it was changed to *The Strayed Sheep*, thus giving a reason for the sheep's existence) or – going beyond the scope of this chapter – the dog being kicked by one of Isabella's brothers in Millais's *Lorenzo and Isabella* (Fig. 62). Those animal images may naturally add to the meaning, as happens in the last example: the act of kicking the animal connotes the man's cruelty. Still, in most cases they are included in the picture for ornamental reasons, creating – as it has been said – an air of oddity and, consequently, correlating visual and the poetic oxymoron quite strongly. Poetry feeds on little oddities introduced with the use of figures based on surprise and incoherence, and it employs them to make utterances “un-familiar” which quality, described and labelled *ostranienie* (“estranging”) by Victor Shklovsky, revitalizes our perception, making it long and “laborious.”⁸³ Although the Russian formalist formulated the principle with regard to literature, it applies to visual estrangement with comparable force.

The already mentioned work *Cromwell on His Farm* contains a few more figurative devices resembling the ones used in poetry: the swine in the foreground may in fact look less unfamiliar in the surroundings of the farm environment than the stylishly dressed Cromwell, who seems taken out of a picture of an English courtyard; he is surrounded by a few peasants, which adds to a more general mood of incongruity. Moreover, an image of Cromwell may function as a representation of the entirety of the Republic, and this results in a visual synecdoche. With a certain permissiveness and interpretative freedom, examples of *pars-pro-toto* can be spotted very easily in many already-discussed works, for instance: the flower representing nature in *Convent Thoughts*, the individual goods of the land standing for the welfare of Egypt in *Afterglow in Egypt*, or the assorted images of women representing the complex concept of Victorian femininity (e.g. Hunt's *Children's Holiday* (Fig. 63) and Brown's *Waiting: An English Fireside of 1854-5*.) Also, one can roughly say that musical instruments appearing in paintings *symbolise* music, although, to be more specific, such a depiction should be called a synecdoche.

Images embodying irony as a rhetorical device are also quite frequent in visual representation. The mockery radiating from Hunt's *Our English Coasts, 1852*

⁸³ Victor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher, Elmwood Park (Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1991), p. 5.

is one of its leading qualities. What disturbs the viewer of the work is the image of the flock of sheep occupying the right hand side of the painting. Scattered, lost and clueless but good-looking and plump, they were perceived as an epitomisation of “England’s enviable bounty”;⁸⁴ the country was prosperous but, simultaneously, vulnerable and defenceless. The mounting impression deriving from a nationalistic reading of the picture is isolation, fear and susceptibility, not pride or honour, and that is why, overall, the painting bears features of an ironic portrayal rather than of a patriotic statement. An equally ironic comment on British society emerges from Brown’s *Work*. The combination of the title of the painting with the social groups represented in it results in an ironic visual statement: it is only the lower classes who work, while the nobility merely observe in a relaxed manner. Finally, the already discussed pair of pictures by Millais, *My First Sermon* and *My Second Sermon*, reveals an ironic observation of the child’s behaviour.

To supplement the list of rhetorical devices discernible in Pre-Raphaelite painting, one can point to a few less elaborate examples of “visual tropes.” Among them, visual allegories like the one in *Our English Coasts, 1852 / Strayed Sheep* can be mentioned, provided that the work is treated as a painterly manifestation of the Biblical allegory of the strayed sheep. Equally clear are the frequent allegories of motherhood, for instance, the depictions of mothers in *The Pretty Baa-Lambs*, *Waiting: An English Fireside of 1854-5*: or *Children’s Holiday*. A parallelism in the structure of a painting is visible in Rossetti’s *The Bower Meadow*: the two pairs of women are positioned in a corresponding spatial order. The same work, as well as another of Rossetti’s canvas, *The Blue Closet* (Fig. 64), contains also visual counterparts for poetic chiasmus, a device based on the symmetrical composition of the elements of an expression. In both paintings, the diagonal structure is manifested by the women’s clothing: the colours agree cornerwise, and some symmetry in the crosswise direction of their looks can also add to the effect. In *The Blue Closet*, the diagonality is additionally emphasized by the x-shaped clavichord legs and the fact that the foreground women’s hands are positioned symmetrically. As the final point, let us mention a painting including elements corresponding to poetic archaism. Such archaic items in a contemporary countryside appear in *Walton-on-the-Naze* to facilitate the link between the present and the past and to indicate the presence of

⁸⁴ Jonathan P. Ribner, “Our English Coasts, 1852: William Holman Hunt and Invasion Fear at Midcentury,” *Art Journal* 55.2 (1996), *Questia*, Nov. 2004, <<http://www.questia.com/>>.

patriotic tradition – as was shown in the section on the narrative features of painting. This and all the previous examples show that poetic figurality can also be manifested in the structure of a painting, which brings the discussion back to the question of the actual *visibility* of rhetorical devices; the answer seems to be affirmative not only in respect to modern art but also to traditional painting.

C. EVOCATION OF MOOD IN PAINTING

The hazy term “mood” lacks proper critical delineation; still, it is an important aspect of poetic imagery, and it is often used by literary critics in their analyses. Poets apply the tools of carefully chosen vocabulary, settings, onomatopoeias and other stylistic figures to equip their poems with the desirable ambiance that they want to evoke in the reader’s mind. Many of the mood-invoking procedures are based on the introduction of sensory images into the poetic discourse – colours, sounds, smells and tastes – which suggests that sensory feelings appeal more to the reader in this respect than purely abstract verbal expressions describing a certain feeling, emotion or idea. That assumption, truistic as it is, reveals a larger potential for the evocation of mood in visual arts since their reception depends on the senses, and, evidently, it is far easier to grasp the atmosphere in which a visual representation is immersed than to discover the “mood” of a verbal account. As a consequence, the concept of mood becomes the next meeting point between the arts. Apart from the effects of purely painterly techniques, a certain mood can be achieved at the level of gesture and action of the portrayed figures.

Several already-discussed paintings reveal a common mood of leisureliness, namely *Green Summer*, *Leisure Hours*, *Spring* and *Il Dolce far Niente*; the latter title (in English translation: “the sweetness of doing nothing”) accurately describes what the artists managed to achieve at the level of the mood of the works. This “sweet doing nothing” is accompanied either by natural surroundings reinforcing such an atmosphere or a decorative background that also enhances the leading message. This unity of mood undoubtedly helps to enforce the desired reception and accounts for the compositional harmony of the painterly work, which is also characteristic of poetry.

The landscape of *Val d’ Aosta* receives its lethargic, hushed ambiance through the placement of a sleeping girl in the foreground; the figure adds to the natural calmness of the mountain scenery that is undisturbed by the presence of any other

human subject. An almost identical type of setting can be seen in *A Waterfall in Glenfinlas* with a difference in the human figure occupying the right side of the view – in this case, a knitting woman; still, her activity is as peaceful as the sleeping girl's. In *The Hayfield*, the atmosphere of serenity and drowsiness is achieved by, first of all, presenting a typical, tranquil countryside in the lighting of the setting sun. Another component of mood that emerges from the painting is that of tiredness and the feeling of well-done labour – that of the farmers and of the artist who is visible in the foreground – combined with the natural atmosphere of the end of a day; as a consequence, the image produces the ambience of finality and recurrence. The melancholic character of *Autumn Leaves* is primarily achieved by the selection of colours and lighting, especially chosen to match the natural shades and gloominess of the season, in the same manner as is done by Brown in *The Pretty Baa-Lambs*, where it is summer's daylight that is emphasized by the painter in the strong central lighting. As the examples show, one of the methods that painters tend to employ to create specific moods in their works is the manipulation of illumination effects, colouring and shading, a technique that has its parallel in poetry in descriptive phrases referring to vision. The closeness of the arts is especially evident here: the linguistic signs employed to express mood are analogous with the visual ones. Yet, given the nature of the medium, the latter do not have to be translated into corresponding images as is usually done in poetry interpretations: the reader visualizes the mood rendered in descriptive phrases, while the viewer starts his interpretation at a different point – with the ready-made visual manifestation.

As previously noted, mood in poetry surfaces in the references to sensory experience; vision is naturally the closest link to painting, but other senses are not disregarded in this respect. The sense of hearing is also often alluded to in mood formation in the visual arts. Music and sound can actually appear in painting, referred to in the signs composing a given work; that is what happens in Rossetti's works *Blue Bower* (Fig. 65), *The Bower Meadow*, *The Blue Closet* and *Morning Music*. In each of them, sound is indicated in the presence of a musical instrument and the act of playing it, but in two cases, the viewer also receives the effects of music within the frame. In *The Bower Meadow*, the women in the background dance to the music produced by those in the foreground; in *Morning Music*, the female figure clearly indulges in the sounds produced by the accompanying men. In the remaining cases, the very act of playing is emphasized. Rossetti himself summarizes

the subject of *The Blue Closet* as “some people playing music,”⁸⁵ while Stephens believes the picture is “intended to symbolize the association of colour with music.”⁸⁶

The latter statement seems especially interesting in the context of cross-artistic and intermedial relationships. Interpretation of *The Blue Bower* has to be influenced by the clear connection between the woman’s visage and positioning and the fact that she is playing the Japanese Koto: the pose seems unnatural, she is portrayed in too awkward a position to be able to play. But that is not the only curious combination that can be found in the work: “The painting is an excellent example of DGR’s determination to make an artistic marriage of western Venetian ideas and motifs with eastern decorative art work, including Japanese ukiyo-e colored prints.”⁸⁷ According to Barringer, *The Blue Bower* may represent the same mixture of colour and sound that is present in the previous painting, *The Blue Closet*: “Rossetti in fact had no ear for music, but he nevertheless proposed that the pattern of tones and textures by which it produced aesthetic pleasure provided an exact analogy with what he was trying to do in his paintings. It is as if each of the opulent colours he used represented a note in a chord, the total effect being a rich harmony.”⁸⁸

A different set of signs for a different kind of sound is represented in *May Morning on Magdalen Tower*; here the indications of music, or rather singing, are the score held by each of the boys in their hands and the singing mouths. The celebration of the sunrise on May Day is significantly influenced by natural images; some of them indicate sound (singing), namely, the twittering birds hovering over the boy’s heads. The celebration of nature thus transforms into a festival of sounds – natural and man-made – making the viewer a listener. The aural images pointed to above not only contribute to the mood-provoking qualities of painting but also reveal an important link between visuality and verbalism – the aurality of painterly representations. Clearly, articulate sounds, like singing, are more functional in this context.

⁸⁵ Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl, eds. *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1828-1882*, vol 1. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965-67), p. 376.

⁸⁶ Frederic George Stephens, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Seeley, 1894), p. 41.

⁸⁷ *The Blue Bower*, in: *The Rossetti Archive*, ed. Jerome McGann, June 2004, <<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s178.rap.html>>.

⁸⁸ Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 150.

D. VISUALIZATION OF EMOTION

The verbal manifestation of emotions is often treated as one of the basic components of poetic expression. In lyric poetry, the internal experience of a human being is translated into linguistic measures to render the internal struggles of the human psyche as fully as possible. The “measures” include a variety of devices distinguishing poetic expression from standard verbal accounts: the density, subjectivity, overstructuring and self-referentiality of poetic language set it apart from everyday speech.

Emotions can surface in a human beings’ outward actions, such as gestures, facial expressions and speech. In this respect, painting seems to be closer to “truth” as it relies on portraying these external signs of emotions without the need to translate anything into a verbal form. The conversion that does take place, however, is the one from real-world action into the visual code utilized on a two-dimensional surface. There is no need to actually *name* the feeling; it is just visualized in a way that can also be recognized in non-artistic communication. Yet, simple imitation of gestures is not the only way to make an emotion apparent: both poetry and painting use various auxiliary devices to make the expression fuller or to strengthen it.

Gestures, facial expressions and body poses represent emotions in such Pre-Raphaelite works as *A Huguenot, on St. Bartholomew’s Day Refusing to Shield Himself from Danger by Wearing A Roman Catholic Badge*, *The Black Brunswicker*, *Cromwell on His Farm*, *The Rescue*, *Annunciation* and *Yes*. The first two paintings show pairs of lovers who undergo a tense experience: *The Black Brunswicker* presents the departure of a soldier going to war, in *A Huguenot,...*, as the title explains, the male figure is endangered by refusing to conform to religious authority. Thus, both works show a threatened male figure and the female response to the danger – distress, sadness and the feeling of inevitability. Whereas the Brunswicker’s reaction is as mournful as the woman’s, the Huguenot, moved by his beloved’s devotion, is smiling, which suggests that he has reconciled himself to oncoming death; the acceptance is expressed in his holding back the badge with his right hand. In *The Black Brunswicker*, it is the woman who seems to have already agreed to their fate: she is looking down sadly with resignation. On the whole, the works are rather over-romanticised visions of love relationships at a moment of trial, but the way passions are depicted in them resembles the tension achieved in poetic images.

The couple portrayed by Millais in *Yes* is also enduring a moment of separation. Here the departure of the man is probably of lighter consequence (possibly a journey) but the tension seems to be equal to the dramatic departures of the Huguenot and the Brunswicker. Millais's depictions of emotion can get more intense. In *The Rescue*, the image of a fireman rescuing children from a burning house is aimed to evoke emotive reception owing to the emphasis on the terrified look on the child's face and a mixture of horror and thankfulness residing on the mother's visage. The effect is strengthened by the dramatic positioning of the children's bodies and the woman's appreciative kneeling down. This combination of gestures creates an immense intensity of commotion apparently disregarded by the fireman, whose face retains the seriousness of simply performing his duty. A similarly intense incident is depicted in Millais's *The Order of Release* (Fig. 66), which shows a happy moment of reunion between a husband and a wife. However, each of the figures experiences the episode in a slightly different manner: the man rests his head on the woman's arm in a gesture of utter relief, while she, holding their baby in her arms, receives him in calmness and ease. The contentment of the situation is reinforced by the delight of the family dog. The fact that all the paintings mentioned above can be treated as representations of the "pregnant moment" allows the viewer to comprehend the story behind the images, which is quite easy to follow, but it is not the narrative line that is the focus of the works – it is rather the intensity of emotion at the particular moment. So strong a concentration of passion makes painting poetic.

The meaning of gesture in Rossetti's *Annunciation* deserves a separate remark. Mary is shown here during the moment of receiving news about her future sanctity, which is quite evidently marked by the presence of Archangel Gabriel and the aureoled dove. What is crucial for the main message of the representation is the incredulous gesture Mary makes with her hands; at the same time, she is looking at the angel disbelievingly, shrugging her arms in a demonstration of doubt. As in the other annunciation painting by Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (Fig. 67), the reaction shown in the expression on Mary's face signifies fear and surprise rather than gratefulness and happiness about her future sainthood.

Anxiety in Oliver Cromwell's mind is the premeditated subject of Brown's *Cromwell on His Farm*, as the artist clarified himself: "At this date, 1636, when Cromwell was engaged in cattle farming, the electrical unease of nerves which is felt

by nations prior to the bursting of the psychological storm, seems to have produced a state of exalted religious fervour mingled with hypochondria.”⁸⁹ As Prettejohn explains, the painting is governed by chaos in which Cromwell is portrayed as mesmerized and unable to act; this rendering reflects his actual condition as a politician after the dismissal of Parliament by Charles I.⁹⁰ The picture thus presents another type of the emotion-evoking devices used in painting: it is no longer a mere expression on a face or a gesture, since additional elements enter the stage to suggest the internal state of mind of the portrayed character; in this case, these are historical knowledge, the setting of the scene and the supplementary peripheralia. To illustrate the functioning of this mode of visualizing emotions, a few other Pre-Raphaelite works can be discussed as examples.

In Millais’s *Stella, No, Yes or No* and *The Bridesmaid*, the facial expressions and gestures are minimalised in favour of the supplementary images that actually convey the bulk of meanings emerging from the paintings. In the first three works, the indicators of the female figures’ inner experience are letters (and a photograph of the beloved in the case of *Yes or No*) written by a distant correspondent, which makes the viewer assume that the portrayed figures are dwelling on the information included in them. Despite the fact that the beholder does not know the content of the correspondence, some assumptions about the kind of emotion represented by the women can be made – especially when one considers the indicative titles: *No* and *Yes or No*. Therefore, the showing of emotion in painting can actually be detached from the figure experiencing a given feeling and alluded to by the use of seemingly peripheral images. A similar conclusion can be drawn from the reading of the aforementioned *The Bridesmaid* by Millais: as has been noted, the woman in the picture is having a sexual fantasy, which is emphasized even more by the “unmistakeably phallic” (according to Pointon) shape of the sugar-caster placed on the table in front of her.⁹¹

To sum up, the visualization of emotion in the discussed paintings is realized at the level of facial expression and gesture but in many cases the exact representation of a feeling has to be assisted by the peripheralia of the depiction. The possibility of identifying the portrayed figure naturally opens the door to

⁸⁹ quoted in: Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 238.

⁹⁰ Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, p. 238.

⁹¹ Pointon, “Histories of Matrimony: J. E. Millais,” p. 115.

interpretation as well. Interestingly enough, the apparently assistory devices very often serve as the actual vehicle for emotion in painting.

* * *

The above presentation of literary qualities of painting, despite its selectiveness, shows nevertheless that the visual arts can be successfully developed by literary criticism. The section, moreover, proves that such analyses result in interpretations which disregard their source: the message emerging from an interpretation of a poetic text might as well be triggered by a visual image. In other words, the visual code is capable of producing equivalent meanings to the ones achieved by verbal language. Not only meanings, though: the equivalence extends to other *prima facie* exclusively poetic qualities like self-reflexivity, estrangement and figurality of expression. However, thus far, only half of the picture has been revealed; the next chapter will show whether similar conclusions can be drawn in reference to the visuality of poetry.

Chapter 6: PAINTERLY FEATURES OF PRE-RAPHAELITE POETRY

I. SPATIALITY IN PRE-RAPHAELITE POETRY

A. BEYOND THE TEMPORALITY OF POETRY

A paradox of poetic pictoriality rests in the fact that visual features of poetry are achieved in the field traditionally denied to poetic accounts, namely, in their spatiality. The essence of the reassessment of Lessing's distinction between poetry and painting, which was presented in the previous chapter, is the conclusion that neither painting is exclusively spatial nor poetry is solely temporal; hence, the problem that arises is how *both* temporality and spatiality work in poems. The proponents of the so-called "spatial form" in literature maintain that it is only achievable as an antithesis of temporality.¹ Nevertheless, that claim has been reexamined too, in two dimensions: first, time and space are inseparable in language and, consequently, in literature, as W.J.T. Mitchell maintains;² secondly, according to Wendy Steiner, to be atemporal does not necessarily mean to be spatial.³ Mitchell refers to Rudolf Arnheim and quotes Jacques Derrida to support his argument: "Time, the form of all sensible phenomena, internal and external, seems to dominate space, the form of external sensible phenomena; but it is a time that one may always represent by a line."⁴ The critic also points to the fact that

[...] spatial form is the perceptual basis of our notion of time, that we literally cannot "tell time" without the mediation of space. All our temporal language is contaminated with spatial imagery: we speak of "long" and "short" times, of "Hintervals" (literally, "spaces between"), of "before" and "after"—all implicit metaphors which depend upon a mental picture of time as a linear continuum. If we are going to dismiss these expressions as mere metaphors, we had better abandon our clocks and their metaphors of circular time as well. A more sensible solution is to note that we experience time in a wide variety of ways and that we consistently use spatial imagery to describe these experiences. In literature, our sense of continuity, sequence, and linear progression is not nonspatial because it is temporal. Continuity and sequentiality are spatial images based in the schema of the unbroken line or surface; the experience of simultaneity or discontinuity is simply based in different kinds of spatial images from those involved in continuous, sequential experiences of time.⁵

¹ W. J. T. Mitchell, "Spatial Form in Literature," in: *The Language of Images*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), p. 274.

² W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 103.

³ Wendy Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 38.

⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri C. Spivak (Baltimore: John's Hopkins, 1976), p. 290.

⁵ Mitchell, "Spatial Form in Literature," p. 274.

It is also hard to disagree with Steiner's claim that atemporality does not equal spatiality. Yet, the theoretician does not give any ready-made answers to the question how to overcome the spatial-temporal problem in poetry and how to overcome the boundaries between the arts; on the contrary, she concludes her argument with an air of failure:

As with sign function in general, the modern reexamination of time and space has uncovered unanticipated complexity. Time and space in fact relate to three very different aspects of the work: the physical artefact, the perception of it, and the meanings it represents, and each of these may involve extremely complex sublevels. It is clear that in some way both arts contain both temporal and spatial properties which artists may exploit to suggest the interartistic analogy. But it is only in extreme cases, e.g., concrete poetry, that the precise correspondence of a verbal text to the spatial-temporal norms of visual art is even conceivable. This is not to say that we should abandon the comparison of the arts, but rather that artistic structure is so complex that a poet intent on a speaking picture or a painter intent on a mute poem has a vast array of technical properties to play with, any one of which, turned from its normal spatiality or temporality, may provoke the interartistic analogy. "The spatial versus the temporal arts" begins to appear too gross a characterization to be useful, and we are forced into a much more technical scrutiny of the way the media of the two arts function, [...]⁶

Clearly, the matter is complicated and multifaceted, but leaving aside two aspects of the work mentioned by Steiner – the physical artefact (concrete poetry) and the mechanics of a work of art's perception – what remains is the third, the represented meanings.⁷ It is at this level where time and space are least possible to be distinguished – in painting *and* in poetry. The combination of Steiner's and Mitchell's arguments can provide an answer to the dilemma presented in both lines of reasoning: if the concepts of space and time in both spatial and temporal arts intermix, it is the very thing that makes them similar! Hence, one is able to discuss the traditionally temporal poetry in terms of space and, analogously, the conventionally spatial painting in terms of time.

The impossibility of distinguishing time from space in literary discourse can be proved on the basis of Pre-Raphaelite poetry. In the following citations, space is "calculated" in terms of temporal units of measurement:

O it's one half-hour to reach the kirk
And one for the marriage-rite;⁸

⁶ Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric*, p. 50.

⁷ As to perception, it has been long claimed that a painting can also be "read," which involves a period of time.

⁸ Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, "Stratton Water," in: *Poems: A New Edition* (London: Strangeways, 1881), p. 28.

Long the miles and many the hours
From the castle-height to the abbey-towers;⁹

This commonplace use of temporality and spatiality in language plainly confirms what Mitchell states in his essay: that a poem “is literally a spatial-temporal construction.”¹⁰ The plainness lies in the fact that if taken out of context, statements like the ones quoted here can be ascribed to other discourses than the poetic one. This may lead to an assertion that verbal language is inherently a spatial-temporal construction. Obviously, it is easier to find time-space unison in narrative poetry, but lyric verse also reveals less straightforward combinations of temporality and spatiality:

Consider the sea’s listless chime:
Time’s self it is, made audible,—
The murmur of the earth’s own shell.
Secret continuance sublime
Is the sea’s end: our sight may pass
No furlong further. Since time was,
This sound hath told the lapse of time.¹¹

In this opening stanza of Rossetti’s “Sea-Limits,” “time” denotes eternity and materialises in the spatial image of apparently limitless sea, or actually, it is made audible in the sea’s sound which, in turn, signifies “The murmur of the earth’s own shell.” Ultimately, the sound connected with space – as earth and sea are spatial concepts – measures the continuance of time. The aural image is, however, confronted by a figure of finality connected with the “sea’s end,” the horizon, as the limit of human perception.¹²

Leaving aside what is conventional and obvious, that is, the established temporality of poetry as well as the problem of time intermingling with space, let us focus on further examples of spatial images in the poetic discourse. The functioning of those representations involves “extremely complex sublevels,”¹³ as Steiner rightly observes; in addition, the emergence of spatiality in poetry reveals interartistic analogies.

⁹ Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, “Rose Mary,” in: *Ballads and Sonnets* (London: Ellis, 1881), p. 18.

¹⁰ Mitchell, *Iconology...*, p. 103.

¹¹ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 254.

¹² David G. Riede, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti Revisited* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), p. 92.

¹³ Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric*, p. 50.

B. THE STATIC SPACE OF PRE-RAPHAELITE POETIC LANDSCAPES

After opening his essay *Space, Ideology, and Literary Representation* with the following sentence: “The first thing to say about the notion of space from a literary point of view is that it does not exist, or should not exist,”¹⁴ Mitchell explains further on that the tradition of Western literary theory is “resolutely iconoclastic, that is, antipictorial, antivisual, antispacial, even, at the most general level, antimimetic.”¹⁵ The tradition dates back to Aristotle who, in *The Poetics*, warns against the “spectacular effect,” that is, any pictorial representation in poetry, and maintains that poetry should be concerned with plot, not with an “appeal to the eye” that results in “monstrosity.”¹⁶ The author of the essay also refers to Genette’s distinction into narration – the “pure processes” and the “temporal, dramatic aspect of the narrative” – and description which serves to “suspend the course of time and to contribute to spreading the narrative in space.”¹⁷

The relationship between the two modes of representation is very unequal; narrative has a privileged role and description is “a mere auxiliary of narrative, [...] quite naturally *ancilla narrationis*, the ever-necessary, ever-submissive, never-emancipated slave.”¹⁸ Thus, the mimetic images of space, which are the “auxiliaries” of the narrative, are treated as an obstacle in poetic expression. They seem to be optional attachments, auxiliary disruptions of the narrative line, but, simultaneously, they are indispensable: “the very thing that seems to block the truly literary experience is also the thing that makes it possible.”¹⁹ Mitchell comes to such a conclusion, echoing Riffaterre who maintains that “the hurdle of mimesis [...] is essential to the reader’s change of mind.”²⁰ However, Riffaterre’s line of reasoning exceeds the point that Mitchell makes. The hurdle of mimesis appears during the initial stage of a reader’s experience with a text: the first, heuristic reading. It is actually surmounted during the second, retroactive reading, and at this particular point, the reader “changes his mind,” i.e. discovers the significance. Both the hurdle and the act of surmounting it are necessary to the occurrence of semiosis.²¹ In other

¹⁴ W.J.T. Mitchell, “Space, Ideology, and Literary Representation,” in: *Poetics Today*, vol. X, no. 1 (1989), p. 91.

¹⁵ Mitchell, “Space, Ideology, and Literary Representation,” p. 91.

¹⁶ quoted in: Mitchell, “Space, Ideology, and Literary Representation,” p. 91.

¹⁷ Gerard Genette, *Figures of Literary Discourse*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 136; quoted in: Mitchell, “Space, Ideology, and Literary Representation,” p. 91.

¹⁸ Genette, *Figures of Literary Discourse*, p. 134.

¹⁹ Mitchell, “Space, Ideology, and Literary Representation,” p. 92.

²⁰ Michael Riffaterre, *The Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 6.

²¹ Riffaterre, *The Semiotics of Poetry*, p. 6.

words, surmounting the hurdle involves an ability to differentiate the mimetic likeness, consisting in one-to-one correspondence, from a verbal icon which is based on similarity of diverse degrees. The following examples will show how vital this ability can be when scenic, motionless spaces are represented.

A typical backdrop scenery, but not of secondary importance, is presented in Rossetti's "Stratton Water." It is a "background" in painterly terms only; its significance is secured at the story-line level of the ballad since the flood plays the primary role in the actions of the protagonist, Lord Sand:

'O have you seen the Stratton flood
That's great with rain to-day?
It runs beneath your wall, Lord Sands,
Full of the new-mown hay.[...]
'What's yonder far below that lies
So white against the slope?'
'O it's a sail o' your bonny barks
The waters have washed up.'[...]
The clouds were still above the hill,
And the shape was still as they.²²

The space introduced in the opening of another of Rossetti's works, "Sudden Light," is a tranquil and familiar scenery:

I have been here before,
But when or how I cannot tell:
I know the grass beyond the door,
The sweet keen smell,
The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.²³

The memory of the revisited place is not only revisualised, however; the last two lines express a play of the senses in which eyesight is the space creator that expands the reader's attention from the "grass beyond the door" to "the lights around the shore."

The following image from Rossetti's ballad *Rose Mary* is pictorial in two respects: first, in an obvious way, it describes a view of natural scenery composed of seven mountain valleys, but more importantly, the image refutes a major argument of the opponents of pictorial poetics, the accusation that it faithfully renders the visible. The passage, in a self-reflexive way, records that only six of those "seven hill-clefts" are actually *visible*:

²² Rossetti, *Poems*, pp. 25-27.

²³ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 242.

Where the road looks to the castle steep,
There are seven hill-clefts wide and deep:
Six mine eyes can search as they list,
But the seventh hollow is brimmed with mist:
If aught were there, it might not be wist.²⁴

The image of mist covering the seventh hollow proves that the poet plays here with the very idea of visual representation in poetry – by the introduction of the idea of the *invisible* in the poetic depiction. Paradoxically, such a move makes the vision generated in the reader's mind more clear or, at least, more natural, comparable with a painting, like the ones shown below.



John Constable, *Helvellyn*



Herman Herzog, *Morning in Yosemite Valley*

The same ballad brings other static images, representing, this time, *non-natural* places:

On many a column fair and tall
A high court ran round the castle-hall;
And thence it was that the priest did call.²⁵

²⁴ Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets*, p. 17.

²⁵ Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets*, p. 44.

Also, the interiors of such places can be vividly portrayed like in the lengthy description of the altar cell Rose Mary enters to find the beryl stone:

The altar-cell was a dome low-lit,
And a veil hung in the midst of it:
At the pole-points of its circling girth
Four symbols stood of the world's first birth,—
Air and water and fire and earth.
To the north, a fountain glittered free;
To the south, there glowed a red fruit-tree;
To the east, a lamp flamed high and fair;
To the west, a crystal casket rare
Held fast a cloud of the fields of air.
The painted walls were a mystic show
Of time's ebb-tide and overflow;
His hoards long-locked and conquering key,
His service-fires that in heaven be,
And earth-wheels whirled perpetually.
Rose Mary gazed from the open door
As on idle things she cared not for,—
The fleeting shapes of an empty tale;
Then stepped with a heedless visage pale,
And lifted aside the altar-veil.
The altar stood from its curved recess
In a coiling serpent's life-likeness:
Even such a serpent evermore
Lies deep asleep at the world's dark core
Till the last Voice shake the sea and shore.
From the altar-cloth a book rose spread
And tapers burned at the altar-head;
And there in the altar-midst alone,
'Twixt wings of a sculptured beast unknown,
Rose Mary saw the Beryl-stone.²⁶

The exact placing of the architectural details vividly sketches the picture for the reader who, under the amalgamation of ornaments, is not only able to re-imagine the symbols represented on the walls but also to situate them in the particular places of the chapel. The picture that the reader gets is the one seen through Rose Mary's eyes, which excludes the poet as the mediator connecting the visual image, the poetic text and the image created in the reader's mind. To an extent, such a statement modifies the definitions of ekphrastic poetry which stress the role of the poet in the process of "representing the representation."²⁷ A further deviation from the definition can be ventured on the above example: if ekphrasis is a poetic representation of a visual

²⁶ Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets*, pp. 53-54.

²⁷ James A. W. Heffernan defines ekphrasis as the "verbal representation of visual representation," thus differentiating it from pictorialism and iconicity – James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashberry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 3.

representation (of a work of art), in the case of this poem, the relationship is even more composite. The painted images in the chapel are described as “a mystic show” and “fleeting shapes of an empty tale”; these remarks suggest that there is a source for the scenes that are depicted on the walls, namely, a Biblical source. Therefore, the painterly images are illustrations of a literary text that were transposed into the visual medium to serve, in turn, as the source for another literary representation – the poem written by Rossetti. Whereas classical ekphrasis relies on double transposition, Rossetti’s treatment of the interior rests on triple conversion!

Morris’s “Summer Dawn” is a dense description of natural phenomena which abounds in visual images:

Pray but one prayer for me ‘twixt thy closed lips,
Think but one thought of me up in the stars.
The summer night waneth, the morning light slips,
Faint and grey ‘**twixt** the leaves of the aspen, **betwixt** the cloud-bars
That are patiently waiting there for the dawn:
Patient and colourless, though Heaven’s gold
Waits to float **through** them along with the sun.
Far out in the meadows, **above** the young corn,
The heavy elms wait, and restless and cold
The uneasy wind rises; the roses are dun;
Through the long twilight they pray for the dawn,
Round the lone house in the **midst** of the corn,
Speak but one word to me **over** the corn,
Over the tender, bow’d locks of the corn.²⁸

The visual value of the poetic account of the break of the day is unmistakable; the spatial significance is also evident. It is achieved mainly with the use of the details of the location: the accumulation of the prepositions of place (in bold type) makes the particular details of the visible landscape precisely positioned in space. The slipping of morning light through the clouds and betwixt the leaves, the oncoming floating of sunlight, which is combined with an image of a cornfield with elms rising above it far in the distance, generate an impressionist picture of a rural landscape that resembles a painting by Monet. Any reading of the poem verges on following a set of directions that are given by the poet to enable the reader to visualize the morning light, the position of the lone house in the middle of the cornfield and the dun roses surrounding the house.

²⁸ William Morris, *The Collected Works of William Morris* (Boston: Adamant Media Corporation, 2000), vol. I, p. 144 (bold type supplied).

Similarly detailed is the description of the castle and its closest surroundings – the moat, the drawbridge and a bridge-house – in another work written by Morris, “Golden Wings.” Also comparable is the poet’s attention to spatial positioning of the particular elements of the view, which is manifested in the use of linguistic localization; for example, the castle stood “Midways of a walled garden,” the red apples shone over the stone walls and each side of the moat “had a red-brick lip.” However, in this case, the details are of purely physical, concrete kind: little attention is paid to the light and shade or the emotions expressed by nature (like in the image of the roses praying for the dawn in the previously discussed poem). No motion appears to play any role in the description of the castle either. Whereas the portrayal of a summer dawn was interspersed with the figurative passing, slipping, floating and the uneasiness of the rising wind, the image of the castle is steeped in tranquillity; it is a place that “Little war [...] knew,” and it is decorated with banners that “seem’d quite full of ease.” While the previous poem resembled an impressionist painting, this one parallels realistic art. What is also worth stressing is the unfolding structure of the depiction; it starts with the castle itself placed in the middle of “a walled garden” and then sequentially covers the walls, the moat, battlements, turrets and the surrounding garden. The centrifugal progress of description adds to the spatial dimension of the whole poem. The poet consciously draws up the space in front of the reader’s eyes instead of just pointing to the visual details:

Midways of a walled garden,
 In the happy poplar land,
 Did an ancient castle stand,
 With an old knight for a warden.
 Many scarlet bricks there were
 In its walls, and old grey stone;
 Over which red apples shone
 At the right time of the year.
 On the bricks the green moss grew,
 Yellow lichen on the stone,
 Over which red apples shone;
 Little war that castle knew.
 Deep green water fili’d the moat,
 Each side had a red-brick lip,
 Green and mossy with the drip
 Of dew and rain; there was a boat
 Of carven wood, with hangings green
 About the stern; it was great bliss
 For lovers to sit there and kiss
 In the hot summer noons, not seen.

Across the moat the fresh west wind
 In very little ripples went;
 The way the heavy aspens bent
 Towards it, was a thing to mind.
 The painted drawbridge over it
 Went up and down with gilded chains,
 'Twas pleasant in the summer rains
 Within the bridge-house there to sit.
 There were five swans that ne'er did eat
 The water-weeds, for ladies came
 Each day, and young knights did the same,
 And gave them cakes and bread for meat.
 They had a house of painted wood,
 A red roof gold-spiked over it,
 Wherein upon their eggs to sit
 Week after week; no drop of blood,
 Drawn from men's bodies by sword-blows,
 Came ever there, or any tear;
 Most certainly from year to year
 'Twas pleasant' as a Provence rose.
 The banners seem'd quite full of ease,
 That over the turret-roofs hung down;
 The battlements could get no frown
 from the flower-moulded cornices.²⁹

The first sight of Iceland portrayed by Morris in the first stanza of "Iceland First Seen" is an account of an experience which involves concentration on the visual and the curiosity of an encounter with the unknown; once again, the strength of the description lies in its spatiality:

Lo from our loitering ship a new land at last to be seen;
 Toothed rocks down the side of the firth on the east guard a weary wide lea,
 And black slope the hillsides above, striped adown with their desolate green:
 And a peak rises up on the west from the meeting of cloud and of sea,
 Foursquare from base unto point like the building of Gods that have been,
 The last of that waste of the mountains all cloud-wreathed and snow-flecked
 and grey,
 And bright with the dawn that began just now at the ending of day.³⁰

The spaces presented here are considerably vaster than the ones shown in the previous examples. They are not represented with the use of placing prepositions; the vocabulary involved here parallels the magnitude of distances and covers the area from the east to the west, and "Foursquare from base unto point." The principal distance is, however, the one separating Iceland itself from the supposed original location of the speaker: the "loitering" ship "at last" reached it, which suggests a

²⁹ Morris, *The Collected Works...*, pp. 116-117.

³⁰ William Morris, *Selected Poems* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 130.

long journey. The speaker of the poem is marvelling at the peculiar beauty of the place, but, at the same time, he is facing uncertainty which concerns the purpose of the journey:

Ah! what came we forth for to see that our hearts are so hot with desire?
Is it enough for our rest, the sight of this desolate strand,
And the mountain-waste voiceless as death but for winds that may sleep not
nor tire?
Why do we long to wend forth through the length and breadth of a land,
Dreadful with grinding of ice, and record of scarce hidden fire,
But that there 'mid the grey grassy dales sore scarred by the ruining streams
Lives the tale of the Northland of old and the undying glory of dreams?³¹

The traveller seems to have doubts about the fulfilment of the initial desires to explore the unknown territory; or rather, the place that he has just seen invokes the feeling of reservation or even fear. “The length and breadth of the land” combined with its climatic hostility terrify the explorers, but they seem to stand by the mission’s mystical objective – to discover “the tale of the Northland of old and the undying glory of dreams.”

The method of drawing up passive spaces in Rossetti’s and Morris’s poems can certainly be assessed as descriptive: the detailed enumeration of the represented objects (natural or artistic) and their exact positioning by means of linguistic localization may suggest the depictions’ illustrative character. However, in the process of surmounting “the hurdle of mimesis,” the reader starts to notice the value of the descriptions as icons (or sets of iconic images) whose essence is the verbal representation of the visual, and it is representation which is based on reproduction of the conditions of perception rather than any similarity to the represented object.³² The unwelcome descriptiveness of poetry proves not to be an obstacle. Description does not consist in mimicking the visible in order to present it truthfully or reliably, but it aims at representing, or rather *generating*, a view in order to make it visible to “the internal eye” of the reader. More generally, descriptiveness makes poetry function as a companion of visual arts, a counterpart which employs different tools and methods. Correspondingly, realistic painting generates views that, in some respects, resemble the objects portrayed, but they are still representations of those objects. The difference between the arts lies, thus, in the apparatus used to create those representations, a difference of paintbrush versus pen, or else, the verbal image

³¹ Morris, *Selected Poems*, p. 130.

³² Umberto Eco, *Nieobecna struktura* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo KR, 2003), p. 127.

versus a painterly image. As it has been shown, verbal poetic images are powerful enough to simulate impressionist paintings and to convey the speaker's emotions; a revelation of such properties of poetry largely demolishes the charges against spatiality or "pictoriality" in verse. Accordingly, the passages quoted above refute Genette's categorisation of description as a slavish auxiliary to narrative.

C. THE ENLIVENED LANDSCAPES IN PRE-RAPHAELITE POETRY

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing considers actions to be "the peculiar subjects of poetry,"³³ thus assuming poetry's inherent temporality. Yet, this same feature accounts for poetry's spatiality: "Actions, on the other hand, cannot exist independently but must always be joined to certain agents. In so far as those agents are bodies or are regarded as such, poetry describes also bodies, but only indirectly through actions."³⁴ Consequently, poetry can describe "bodies" as elements of space, but the actions of those bodies can actually indicate "spaces" understood more broadly. In fact, Lessing's claim concerning poetry's ability to express actions already implies spatiality, even without his stating it: actions, regardless of their bodily connection, do appear in space; the very idea of movement, progress, motion or gesture is fundamentally based on a spatial reference system. "The common mistake," as Mitchell calls it, is the one "of regarding space and time as antithetical modalities is reflected in the tendency of literary critics to speak of spatial form as 'static,' or 'frozen,' or as involving some simultaneous, in-stantaneous, and wholistic impression of that which is 'really' temporal."³⁵ In a different context, time and space are united in Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of chronotope: "In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history."³⁶

As it turns out, poetry does not have to renounce its primary, conventional feature, temporality, to acquire the feature that to some critics is aberrant, spatiality, as space and time merge quite successfully in the poetic discourse. Approaching the

³³ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: As Essay Upon the Limits of Poetry and Painting*, trans. E. Frothingham (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 1766), p. 91; quoted in Mitchell, *Iconology*, pp. 100-1.

³⁴ Lessing, *Laocoon*, p. 92; quoted in: Mitchell, *Iconology*, pp. 101.

³⁵ Mitchell, "Spatial Form in Literature," p. 274.

³⁶ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 84.

problem from a different perspective, one can come to the conclusion that poetry's temporality does not eliminate its potential spatiality since space is not necessarily static or frozen. The assumption will be corroborated in the following discussion as a result of an analysis which will focus on the spaces (landscapes) that reveal manifestations of motion and dynamism, contrary to the static portrayals presented in the previous section.

Motion can be expressed in a single image like in the one from Rossetti's sonnet "Autumn Idleness" which represents an act of pointless sauntering and a reference to the human body's spatial mark, the shadow. The space covered by the projection of the moving human figure relates to aimlessness experienced by the speaker:

Till eve bring rest when other good things pass.
And here the lost hours the lost hours renew
While I still lead my shadow o'er the grass,
Nor know, for longing, that which I should do.³⁷

Movement can also be manifested with a series of images that compose a narrative:

Lord Sands has passed the turret-stair,
The court, and yard, and all;
The kine were in the byre that day,
The nags were in the stall.
Lord Sands has won the weltering slope
Whereon the white shape lay:³⁸

The dynamic image from Rossetti's "Stratton Water" within a few lines presents a huge distance that Lord Sands is covering: from his chamber in the castle to the hill on which he had noticed "the white shape." The reader is informed about the extent of the space a few stanzas earlier at which point Lord Sands is still in the castle, surveying its flooded surroundings: "What's yonder far below that lies / So white against the slope?"³⁹ Moreover, the poet finds it fitting to concurrently mention the cattle in the barn and the horses in the stall, distracting the reader from the Lord's trip as though Rossetti wanted to "give the character time" to cover the distance. The use of the word "win" in reference to the character's successful climb emphasizes fulfilment and the effort put into the act.

³⁷ Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets*, p. 231.

³⁸ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 26.

³⁹ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 26.

The images of running down the stairs and of the subsequent trip resemble the ones used in *Rose Mary*; in the following fragment, the heroine escapes from the castle and enters a natural realm, progressively passing its spatially distant elements:

The lady arose, and sped down all
The winding stairs to the castle-hall.
Long-known valley and wood and stream,
As the loopholes passed, naught else did seem
Than the torn threads of a broken dream.⁴⁰

Another excursion undertaken by the protagonist of “Stratton Water” has its destination in the local church where he intends to marry his beloved, Janet:

‘O it’s one half-hour to reach the kirk
And one for the marriage-rite;
And kirk and castle and castle-lands
Shall be our babe’s to-night.’⁴¹

The last line clearly, but oddly, manifests the Lord’s certainty about being able to cover the distance between the hill and the church and back to the castle despite the rising flood. His hopes become fulfilled when he notices a boat floating by:

Beneath them on the nether hill
A boat was floating wide:
Lord Sands swam out and caught the oars
And rowed to the hill-side.⁴²

By showing the character swimming out to the boat and rowing back, the poet draws an additional dimension of space in the poem’s structure.

Still another spatial construction suggests “verticality” in Rossetti’s sonnet “The Landmark”:

Was *that* the landmark? What,—the foolish well
Whose wave, low down, I did not stoop to drink,
But sat and flung the pebbles from its brink
In sport to send its imaged skies pell-mell,⁴³

The use of the well, the landmark, and the strong highlighting of its depth are combined here with the speaker’s actions: throwing pebbles into the well and

⁴⁰ Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets*, p. 35.

⁴¹ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 30.

⁴² Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 31.

⁴³ Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets*, p. 229.

distorting the water. The cylindrical space of the well reaches up not merely to the ground but high up to the sky since the surface of the water reflects the image of the sky. The space covered in the image is clearly arranged vertically, and the plummeting pebbles indicate motion.

Morris's "The Haystack in the Floods" opens with a motion-oriented image of a Frenchwoman, Jehane, accompanying her beloved man, a soldier in the Hundred Years War:

Along the dripping leafless woods,
The stirrup touching either shoe,
She rode astride as troopers do;
With kirtle kilted to her knee,
To which the mud splash'd wretchedly;
And the wet dripp'd from every tree
Upon her head and heavy hair,
And on her eyelids broad and fair;
The tears and rain ran down her face.
By fits and starts they rode apace,
And very often was his place
Far off from her; he had to ride
Ahead, to see what might betide
When the roads cross'd; and sometimes, when
There rose a murmuring from his men,
Had to turn back with promises;⁴⁴

The gruesomeness of the ride is emphasized by the visual details of the woman's attire and countenance; the action's spatial frame of reference are the dripping trees of the "leafless woods." There appears also a indication of the moments of physical separation between the lovers: "very often was his place / Far off from her," but these are only the forebodings of the ultimate isolation they were to experience, Robert's death. The moment of the interruption of their rendezvous, the man's decapitation, is strictly connected with a spatial reference point, the soaked haystack that they approached:

For when they near'd that old soak'd hay,
They saw across the only way
That Judas, Godmar, and the three
Red running lions dismally
Grinn'd from his pennon, under which
In one straight line along the ditch,
They counted thirty heads.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Morris, *The Collected Works...*, p. 124.

⁴⁵ Morris, *The Collected Works...*, pp. 124-125.

The final parting comes as a dramatic and violent event that is full of motion and impetuosity:

With a start
Up Godmar rose, thrust them apart;
From Robert's throat he loosed the bands
Of silk and mail; with empty hands
Held out, she stood and gazed, and saw
The long bright blade without a flaw
Glide out from Godmar's sheath, his hand
In Robert's hair; she saw him bend
Back Robert's head; she saw him send
The thin steel down; the blow told well,
Right backward the knight Robert fell,
And moan'd as dogs do, being half dead,
Unwitting, as I deem: so then
Godmar turn'd grinning to his men,
Who ran, some five or six, and beat
His head to pieces at their feet.⁴⁶

The description abounds in spatial references that produce the atmosphere of brutality and abruptness in the scene; this, in turn, results in the overall dynamism of the description.

Whereas the passage from “Haystack in the Floods” depicts human agents in movement, the following one, taken from Rossetti's “A Last Confession,” only seemingly refers to animate subjects:

I know last night
I dreamed I saw into the garden of God,
Where women walked whose painted images
I have seen with candles round them in the church.
They bent this way and that, one to another,
Playing.⁴⁷

The fragment reveals an enlivening of a painted image in a dream, a vision of a heavenly garden, which is experienced by the speaker. The spatiality of the image is constructed by the women's movements – they are “walking” and “bending” – as well as by the additional accessories that perform the function of painterly ornaments: “the rings of fire” floating over the women's heads seem to follow their actions:

[...] and over the long golden hair
Of each there floated like a ring of fire

⁴⁶ Morris, *The Collected Works...*, p. 128.

⁴⁷ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 144.

Which when she stooped stooped with her, and when she rose
Rose with her.⁴⁸

Further motion and unrest are launched by the breeze entering the space through an otherworldly window:

Then a breeze flew in among them,
As if a window had been opened in heaven
For God to give his blessing from, before
This world of ours should set;⁴⁹

An intriguing feature of Rossetti's imagery in the poem is the initial transfer of a painted spatial image of women to a resembling impression created in the speaker's mind. The vision that the speaker experiences also bears spatial qualities: the painted images from a church are *surrounded* by candles. The dying Italian freedom fighter re-imagines and revives the painting that he has once seen as a realistic observation with the details of motion and ornamentation. Rossetti's handling of the description, in turn, allows the reader to visualize the soldier's dream. Therefore, it is not the painting that the poet describes in the work but the speaker's vision incorporating the painting.

In *Rose Mary*, an animated spatial image is a result of an enlivening of certain elements of landscape by means of anthropomorphism:

Still the road winds ever anew
As it hastens on towards Holycleugh;
And ever the great walls loom more near,
Till the castle-shadow, steep and sheer,
Drifts like a cloud, and the sky is clear.⁵⁰

The fact that the road *winds* and *hastens* towards a remote location gives rise to the reader's vision of the space as being extensive; the "haste" together with the drift of the castle shadow animate the landscape. The act of gradual approaching the castle is evident in the repetition of the adverb "ever," especially in the plain observation: "ever the great walls loom more near." The combination of the particular poetic signs generates a visual image which is dynamic and animated even though it refers to a motionless piece of scenery. It is the case when the seemingly background-like view comes to the foreground: by means of personification, the inanimate components of

⁴⁸ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 149.

⁴⁹ Rossetti, *Poems*, pp. 149-150.

⁵⁰ Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets*, p. 18.

the landscape assume the role of the subjects of the narrative. A picture of a similar kind can be found in Rossetti's "Possession," but here the image is supported by the addition of the object's actual motion:

There is a cloud above the sunset hill,
That wends and makes no stay,
For its goal lies beyond the fiery west;
A lingering breath no calm can chase away,
The onward labour of the wind's last will;
A flying foam that overleaps the crest
Of the top wave: [...]⁵¹

The cloud, the wind and the waves are represented in dynamic traffic. Not only is the space defined locally – the cloud is positioned above the hill – but it is also stretched out to create a distance: the cloud's aim is the "fiery west." The intensity and the dynamism are reinforced by the "labour" of the wind and the "flying foam" leaping over the crest.

The elements of movement shown in the last two excerpts from Pre-Raphaelite poetry refer to apparently motionless spaces; yet, Rossetti managed to animate them by equipping the particular components of scenery with human-like features. Most of the enlivened spaces, however, are created by the presence of human agents inside the descriptions: the "bodies" that shape the spaces and, through "actions," make them dynamic. In the light of the above examples, it is clear that poetry does not describe the bodies *only* through actions, which was clearly shown in the previous section, but actions – that is, acts of humans as well as any form of motion represented in poetry – help to *create* spaces. The notion of movement expressed through human action (direct and represented in art) or through personification foreshadows the ensuing argument which focuses on the role of the observer or the speaker within the spaces drawn in poetic images.

D. VIEWERS AND VIEWING IN POETIC SPACES

Spatial relations in poetry reveal their additional characteristics in the situation when the speaking subject is located within the space described. The human agent juxtaposed with other spatial constituents of a scene or with other human participants reduces the passivity and the stillness of description. Such an inclusion is usually connected with the speaker's act of viewing. The pictoriality of

⁵¹ Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets*, p. 303.

representation is thus emphasized: the absence of an active internal observer suspends a description at the level of abstraction and imagination, but the inclusion of a viewer equips the reader with a first-hand account. It does not mean, however, that the speaker/viewer describes what he can actually see; it would reduce the “poeticity” of such images and bring those descriptions close to, for instance, journalistic reports. The visual image usually involves distancing the object of description from its representation by the replacement of a view with a vision or by the introduction of another subject’s visual experiences:

[...] I remember
 A woman laughed above me. I looked up
 And saw where a brown-shouldered harlot leaned
 Half through a tavern window thick with vine.⁵²

In this extract from Rossetti’s “A Last Confession,” the speaker situates himself and the woman he recalls in the spatial relation of above – down below: he looks up to see the woman leaning out of the window above him. The actuality of the account is destroyed by the fact that it is not a report of an experience that the speaker goes through at the story time but a reminiscence of a past incident. As to the space, it is further expanded by the appearance of a man inside the woman’s room:

Some man had come behind her in the room
 And caught her by her arms, and she had turned
 With that coarse empty laugh on him, as now
 He munched her neck with kisses, while the vine
 Crawled in her back.⁵³

At this point, the speaker’s space is an alien area in relation to the harlot’s; in fact, the speaker, previously a participant of the scene, is now becoming a mere observer. The spatial references are partly responsible for the detachment: clearly, the speaker’s place is down, under the window while the main story is taking place above, in a room of the tavern. It is also interesting how the image of the vine is presented in the poem. The plant can serve as an intermediary between the inside and the outside as it belongs to the external, natural world that “crawls in” the woman’s back while she is retreating back into the room.

⁵² Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 167.

⁵³ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 167.

Static landscapes also gain on the painterly value when they are presented by an inside agent like in another fragment of Rossetti's *Rose Mary*:

Again I stand where the roads divide;
But now all's near on the steep hillside,
And a thread far down is the rivertide.⁵⁴

Standing at the fork of the roads, the speaker/observer refers to the nearness of the steep hillside and the remoteness of the riverbed which is metaphorically presented as a barely perceptible "thread." It is this particular designation that expands the view and the space portrayed: the expansion is achieved by the visual diminution of the river's actual size. This optical effect is thus achieved with poetic means. Another fluvial image can be discerned in Christina Rossetti's "Paradise":

I saw the fourfold River flow,
And deep it was, with golden sand;
It flowed between a mossy land
With murmured music grave and low.⁵⁵

This passage shows no indication of any remote part of the landscape; instead, the river flow itself and its closest surroundings are described. The space is still clearly traceable in the references to the depth of the river, its fourfold split, the placing "between a mossy land" and the golden sand at its bed. The figure of the speaker, who is situated within the "frame" of the picture, equips the description with indirectness since "Paradise" is a dream vision; the speaker discloses the fact in the opening lines: "Once in a dream I saw the flowers / That bud and bloom in Paradise."

Apart from revealing the character of the poetic representation, the first sentence of Christina Rossetti's work exposes the theme of looking connected with spatial imagery. Later on in the text, another spatially oriented image comes into view:

I saw the Gate called Beautiful;
And looked but scarce could look within;
I saw the golden streets begin,
And outskirts of glassy pool.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets*, p. 15.

⁵⁵ Christina Rossetti, *The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti* (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p. 180.

⁵⁶ C. Rossetti, *The Poetical Works* ..., p. 181.

The vision involves a look at the gate of paradise, but certain difficulty in seeing the inside of the place is also ascertained: the observer gets a glimpse of the beginning of the streets and “the outskirts of glassy pool,” so the remainder of the inner space is thus just suggested. The emphasis on looking that emerges from the poem is a characteristic trait of Pre-Raphaelite poetry and often functional in representations of space. It surfaced in the abovementioned “A Last Confession” by Dante Gabriel Rossetti when the speaker “looks up” to see the woman in the window. Still, it is not always the speaking subject that looks, sees or observes. In Morris’s “Welland River,” “fair Ellayne” notices her beloved Robert approaching her over Stamford bridge:

But as Ellayne sat on her window seat
And comb’d her yellow hair,
She saw come over Stamford bridge
The scarlet pennon fair.⁵⁷

The situation here is opposite to the one from Rossetti’s poem as, in this case, the *observer* is sitting at a window and looking downwards. In “King Arthur’s Tomb,” Morris presents an image of Guinevre which shows the misery expressed in her gaze:

At first she said no word, but lay quite still,
Only her mouth was open, and her eyes
Gazed wretchedly about from hill to hill,⁵⁸

The stillness of the scene is reinforced by the miserable gaze scanning the nearby scenery which is vast in scope but becomes condensed by the act of looking. Similarly compressed is the landscape in “Stratton Water.” The already mentioned protagonist of the ballad surveys the flooded grounds outside his castle walls; the view stretches from the west to the east:

Out from the castle-stair Lord Sands
Looked up the western lea;
The rook was grieving on her nest,
The flood was round her tree.
Over the castle-wall Lord Sands
Looked down the eastern hill:
The stakes swam free among the boats,
The flood was rising still.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Morris, *The Collected Works...*, p. 132.

⁵⁸ Morris, *The Collected Works...*, p. 15.

⁵⁹ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 25.

Similarly, in “The Choice” by Rossetti, the speaker encourages the addressee of his words to look at the scenery:

Nay, come up hither. From this wave-washed
Unto the furthest flood-brim look with me;
Then reach on with thy thought till it be drown’d.
Miles and miles distant though the last line be,⁶⁰

Although the image refers to a physical space, the sea shore and the horizon, it is clear that it assumes a metaphorical dimension as the eyesight is supposed to be followed by the “thought.” In other words, sensible judgment is incited to cover the same distance as perception in search of a solution of the choice concerning the values one should believe in. Finally, “The Sea Limits” by Rossetti also brings a maritime image connected with looking:

Secret continuance sublime
Is the sea’s end: our sight may pass
No furlong further.⁶¹

The passage reveals a limit to the power of sight, but it also reveals a mysterious unknown inherently coupled with what surpasses human vision. Thus, the space stays unlimited: the sea’s end is called “Secret continuance sublime,” which strongly undermines the importance of the visible since it is exactly the space beyond the eyesight that most appeals to imagination.

The poetic representations of the act of looking naturally create an intersystemic connection between literature and the visual arts. At the same time, such passages in poetry may actually work against the other medium by revealing the limits of human perception. Yet, the representations of looking by no means work against the interartistic relationships provided that the sensory perception is treated as the initial instigator of a comprehension process, and under the condition that a painting is not only viewed but also read in the way a poem is read. Moreover, it does not really matter in what order the works are deciphered,⁶² or whether, and for

⁶⁰ Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets*, p. 233.

⁶¹ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 254.

⁶² “The other temporal barrier between painting and literature is stated in Arnheim’s observation that the ordering of perceptual process in literature is predetermined by the text, whereas the painting does not have such prescriptive power over the sequence of our eye scans.” Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric*, p. 40, referring to: Rudolf Arnheim, “The Unity of the Arts: Time, Space, and Distance,” in: *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, No. 25 (1976), p. 8.

how long, the “afterimages” of a poem or a painting stay in our minds;⁶³ it is crucial that such an image *is created* in our minds as a phenomenological *Ansicht*,⁶⁴ *L’Imaginaire*⁶⁵ or an iconic sign. If the latter condition is fulfilled, the power of poetic language to generate visual images cannot be denied. What has been also shown in the above examples is the possibility to treat the speaker of a poem as a viewer, that is to say, to use a concept conventionally reserved for discussions of visual representation. The roles and positions of the viewers vary: from an account of a lyrical I whose impressions serve as a source for the reader’s imagination, through the speaker who is describing a view, to a character inside the narrative who is looking or is being looked at. The expression “point of view” gains a new dimension in this context: the literary perspective of a narrator/speaker is being replaced by the literal “point from which one is looking”; this narrative situation consequently and inevitably involves space.

* * *

The initial thesis of the above argument that space and time do intermix, and that this fact leads to the interpenetration of the arts, clearly facilitates the treatment of spatiality as a feature of poetic representation. Even if spatial images appear in descriptive passages, like depictions of motionless landscapes, it does not imply that those images function as mere ornaments that are auxiliary to the “main” meaning of a poem. Spatiality definitely gains in significance when the questions of the point of view, agency and perception are discussed: not only is space involved in such discourses, but it also utilizes its apparent antithesis, time, in the struggle to become a leading quality of a poetic account. This is possible due to the connection that surfaces when dynamic images are represented: dynamism denotes temporal “actions” which, in turn, relate to “bodies,” and bodies indicate spaces. As it has been manifested in the examples from Pre-Raphaelite poetry, the interrelation of time and space and, consequently, the emergence of spatiality as prominent attribute of poetry are inevitable.

⁶³ Roman Jakobson, “On the Relation between Visual and Auditory Signs,” in: *Language in Literature*, eds. K. Pomorska and S. Rudy (Cambridge, London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 472-3.

⁶⁴ “wygląd” – according to S. Wyślouch, a term coined by Husserl and adopted by Ingarden (as “aspect”) in *The Literary Work of Art*, trans. George C. Grabowicz (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 328; Seweryna Wyślouch, *Literatura i semiotyka* [Literature and semiotics] (Warszawa: PWN, 2001), p. 79.

⁶⁵ “wyobrażenie” [the Imaginary] – a comparable term coined by Jean-Paul Sartre in: *L’imaginaire; psychologie phénoménologique de l’imagination* (Paris: Gallimard, 1940), according to: Wyślouch, *Literatura i semiotyka*, p. 78.

II. PICTORIALITY AS A RESULT OF PARTICULARISATION IN PRE-RAPHAELITE POETRY

He who would do good to another must do it in Minute Particulars.
General Good is the plea of the scoundrel, hypocrite, and flatterer;
For Art and Science cannot exist but in minutely organized Particulars,
And not in generalizing Demonstrations of the Rational Power:
The Infinite alone resides in Definite and Determinate Identity.

William Blake *The Holiness of Minute Particulars*

A. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF IRRELEVANT PARTICULARS: THE POETIC DETAIL AS A MEANS OF ACHIEVING PICTORIALITY

The aim of the ensuing section is to show how pictoriality of the poetic discourse is achieved through the use of detailed images in Pre-Raphaelite verse. The visual value of the poetic detail seems to be unquestionable; whenever a poetic image reveals a set of particulars, it usually refers to the visible or to the act of seeing. This truth, however, had been raising controversy among the critics of the Brotherhood's work until the time when Jerome McGann's famous defence of Rossetti's "significant details" was published.⁶⁶ McGann challenges the attacks on the Pre-Raphaelites which were based on the artists' use of the "curious trick of particularising" or "[t]he particularity of sensory detail, of which the thematic relevance is not obvious,"⁶⁷ not to mention Weatherby's condemnation of the "unhealthily sensuous"⁶⁸ details of love poetry. The defence generally explores the notion of the details' significance: McGann emphasises the fact that the relevance is achieved exactly owing to the sensory character of the particulars, and this is precisely what the following discussion will also concentrate on. First, however, a brief reference to the previous analysis of spatiality in Pre-Raphaelite poetry is necessary since this argument already included a framework for the issues that will resurface in the scrutiny of "particularisation" in poetry.

The painterly character of the spatial images discussed so far was in many cases conditioned on the occurrence of the precisely shown details of the visible. The distance shown in the landscape in Rossetti's ballad "Stratton Water" is partially

⁶⁶ Jerome J. McGann, "Rossetti's Significant Details," in: *Pre-Raphaelitism: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. James Sambrook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 230-242. The essay was first published in *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 7 (1969) pp. 41-54.

⁶⁷ W. W. Robson, "Pre-Raphaelite Poetry," in *From Dickens to Hardy, Pelican Guide to English Literature VI*, ed. Boris Ford (London, 1958), p. 355; quoted in: McGann, "Rossetti's Significant Details," p. 230.

⁶⁸ Harold L. Weatherby, "Problems of Form and Content in the Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti," *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 2 (1964), pp. 11-19; quoted in: McGann, "Rossetti's Significant Details," p. 230.

created by the revelation of the white shape “against the slope” which is a barely perceptible element of the scenery. Particularisation of a different kind surfaces in Morris’s description of a summer morning in “Summer Dawn”: as it has been said, the amalgamation of words and phrases referring to space situates and arranges the particular elements of the view in the poem, but diction also makes the landscape precise and meticulous. The same can be said about the architecturally precise description of the altar cell in *Mary Rose* and about the portrayal of the castle surroundings in “Golden Wings.” In the latter case, particularisation does not only refer to the number of separate items mentioned but also to the way they are presented: in a detailed, ordered manner, from the castle itself as the centre of description to gradually cover its further and further background. Finally, the specification of landscape in “Iceland” helps the reader to visualize the vastness and the atrociousness of the scenery.

What has been pointed out in the references to the previous analyses reveals a set of issues that are to be dealt with in the area of detailed representation: the basic functions of detail in poetic accounts and the techniques of their implementation, the problematic issues of realism and relevance in such representations and, principally, the questions of the input of particularisation in the study of the visual qualities of poetry. These issues will resurface as themes of the following argument and will be analysed with the use of further instances of detailed portrayals in the Rossettis’ and in Morris’s works. For clearness’ sake, the sets of examples have been arranged into four groups concerning, successively, images of physical and natural objects, representations of sensuality, references to the process of perception and, finally, particularisation of human actions.

B. METICULOUSNESS OF THE PHYSICAL AND THE NATURAL DETAIL

The techniques of the descriptions of physical objects usually take the form of either detailed presentations of the objects’ chosen features or equally particularized enumerations of a number of traits that constitute a given piece of physical reality. The former case can be exemplified by a passage from Rossetti’s ballad *Rose Mary* that centres around the heroine’s preoccupation with the magic beryl stone; the jewel’s description abounds in its visual features:

The lady unbound her jewelled zone
And drew from her robe the Beryl-stone.

Shaped it was to a shadowy sphere,—
 World of our world, the sun's compeer,
 That bears and buries the toiling year.
 With shuddering light 'twas stirred and strewn
 Like the cloud-nest of the wading moon:
 Freaked it was as the bubble's ball,
 Rainbow-hued through a misty pall
 Like the middle light of the waterfall.⁶⁹

Although the detail is small in size, it focalises a universe of natural phenomena in its poetic expression – the sun, the moon, clouds, rainbow, misty palls and a waterfall – to become a “shadowy sphere,” “a world of our world,” in other words, a condensed micro-universe. The description emphasizes the jewel's shape – its perfect roundness – but also the effect that light produces on its surface, comparing those visual effects to the ones occurring in nature. Consequently, the particularisation of the beryl stone lies in the poet's detailed, almost exaggerated depiction of the shape and lighting effects. The roundness is repeatedly denoted in the vocabulary: “the sun,” “the moon” and “the bubble's ball” denote spherical shape. The lighting reappears in words and phrases like “shadowy,” “shuddering light,” “wading moon” and also in the last two of the quoted lines; they express the effect of dispersion of light on the stone compared to the one occurring in water.

The meticulousness of this description does not consist in the enumeration of the diverse features of the object but in the overblown presentation of the chosen ones, contrary to the situation in, for example, Morris's “Near Avalon” in which poem a variety of an object's attributes is presented:

A ship with shields before the sun,
 Six maidens round the mast,
 A red-gold crown on every one,
 A green gown on the last.
 The fluttering green banners there
 Are wrought with ladies' heads most fair,
 And a portraiture of Guenevere
 The middle of each sail doth bear.
 A ship with sails before the wind,
 And round the helm six knights,
 Their heaumes are on, whereby, half blind,
 They pass by many sights.
 The tatter'd scarlet banners there,
 Right soon will leave the spear-heads bare,
 Those six knights sorrowfully bear
 In all their heaumes some yellow hair.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets*, p. 18.

⁷⁰ Morris, *Selected Poems*, p. 46.

The ship is described thoroughly, but no special attention is paid to any of its parts. The ornaments of the masts and the sails add to the overall picture of the ship, making it more precise. Similarly, a depiction of a dream knight's sword in *Rapunzel* centres around various features of the weapon:

*Also: Send me a true knight,
Lord Christ, with a steel sword, bright,
Broad, and trenchant; yea, and seven
Spans from hilt to point, O Lord!
And let the handle of his sword
Be gold on silver, Lord in heaven!
Such a sword as I see gleam
Sometimes, when they let me dream.*⁷¹

The object's minutest details are presented although the account appears to be of visionary character: the speaker is just relating a dream about the sword.

Morris takes a curious approach to the visible in a description of a tower from the same poem; the depiction includes the items that can be distinguished in view as well as those that are absent from it:

Now some few fathoms from the place where I
Lay in the beech-wood, was a tower fair,
The marble corners faint against the sky;
And dreamily I wonder'd what lived there:

Because it seem'd a dwelling for a queen,
No belfry for the swinging of great bells;
No bolt or stone had ever crush'd the green
Shafts, amber and rose walls; no soot that tells

Of the Norse torches burning up the roofs,
On the flower-carven marble could I see;
But rather on all sides I saw the proofs
Of a great loneliness that sicken'd me;⁷²

The speaker speculates about the inhabitant of the building and projects certain attachments and architectural elements that one expects to be present in view, only to discover that the tower lacks these elements. The features that he actually notices are the marble corners ("the flower-carven marble"), the shafts, the amber and rose walls and the mysterious "proofs /Of a great loneliness." A similar reference to the details that cannot actually be seen appears in Rossetti's "Winter":

⁷¹ William Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (London: Longmans, Green & CO., 1908), p. 123.

⁷² Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere...*, pp. 118-119.

And for a rose-flower on the darkling mould
The hungry redbreast gleams. No bloom, no bee.⁷³

Accordingly, for Rossetti and for Morris the visible almost naturally involves the occurrence of the absent, imaginary elements of the view that the poets just envisage as composing the visible. However, the representations are still markedly detailed, and this once again proves that particularisation does not require “realistic” images.

Particular features of a female face are presented with great consideration in another poem by Morris, *Concerning Geffray Teste Noire*:

Into my heart; I kiss *their soft lids there,*
And in green gardens scarce can stop my lips
From wandering on your face, but that your hair
Falls down and tangles me, back my face slips.

Or say your mouth – I saw you drink red wine
Once at a feast; how slowly it sank in,
As though you fear’d that some wild fate might twine
Within that cup, and slay you for a sin.

And when you talk your lips do arch and move
In such wise that a language new I know
Besides their sound; they quiver, too, with love
When you are standing silent; know this, too,

I saw you kissing once, like a curved sword
That bites with all its edge, did your lips lie,
Curled gently, slowly, long time could afford
For caught-up breathings; like a dying sigh⁷⁴

Whereas the image of the eyes is presented in one, purely sensual context, the woman’s lips are shown in various situations in which they assume different features. The speaker notices their reluctance in drinking wine, their alluring movement while speaking and being silent, and, finally, he alludes to the passionate calmness of kissing. The series of images offers another type of particularisation: a detail is selected and shown in a set of visual contexts instead of being revealed in just one particular manifestation.

A pair of Rossetti’s poems, “Winter” and “Spring,” serves as perfect examples of a poetic landscape in which the speaker seems to aim at including as many details of the view as possible. Each of the works exposes an amalgamation of particulars typical of the specific seasons:

⁷³ Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets*, p. 322.

⁷⁴ Morris, *Selected Poems*, p. 57.

“Winter”

How large that thrush looks on the bare thorn-tree!
A swarm of such, three little months ago,
Had hidden in the leaves and let none know
Save by the outburst of their minstrelsy.
A white flake here and there—a snow-lily
Of last night’s frost—our naked flower-beds hold;
And for a rose-flower on the darkling mould
The hungry redbreast gleams. No bloom, no bee.
The current shudders to its ice-bound sedge:
Nipped in their bath, the stark reeds one by one
Flash each its clinging diamond in the sun:
‘Neath winds which for this Winter’s sovereign
Shall curb great king-masts to the ocean’s edge
And leave memorial forest-king’s o’erthrown.⁷⁵

“Spring”

Soft-littered is the new-year’s lambing-fold,
And in the hollowed haystack at its side
The shepherd lies o’ nights now, wakeful-eyed
At the ewes’ travailing call through the dark cold.
The young rooks cheep ‘mid the thick caw o’ the old:
And near unpeopled stream-sides, on the ground,
By her spring-cry the moorhen’s nest is found,
Where the drained flood-lands flaunt their marigold.
Chill are the gusts to which the pastures cower,
And chill the current where the young reeds stand
As green and close as the young wheat on land:
Yet here the cuckoo and the cuckoo-flower
Plight to the heart Spring’s perfect imminent hour
Whose breath shall soothe you like your dear⁷⁶

What emerges from the accounts is the poet’s attentiveness to the smallest items of the landscapes and the persistence on the number of them included in the poems. The multitude of details exceeding simple perception and comprehension, almost inhibits any visualization of the picture by the reader. Still, the visible plays the leading role in the imagery of the poem; it is especially significant in remarks like the one opening “Winter” which translates an optical effect into the verbal: in the winter aura, a thrush on bare branches looks large to the observer, contrary to the summer time when a flock of birds seems invisible on the overleaved boughs.

While the techniques of the employment of detailed images concerning physical and natural objects vary from multifaceted descriptions of visual qualities – single or numerous – to portrayals concentrating on an individual detail, the result of the employment is the intensification of visuality in a poetic text. This does not

⁷⁵ Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets*, p. 322.

⁷⁶ Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets*, p. 323.

necessarily involve realistic rendition: in some cases, the descriptions become *unrealistic* by including non-existent, absent or imaginary objects. In addition, any form of realism disappears in depictions that include more details than the human eye is able to discern in “reality.” The pictoriality of the above passages is achieved through an invitation offered to the reader by the speaker of the poem – an invitation to *visualise*, to create spaces and situate particular details in them, or to envisage elements which those spaces are deficient in.

C. PARTICULARISATION IN SENSUAL IMAGES

Representations of carnality and their functions are a topic often exploited in Pre-Raphaelite poetry. The most pictorial and most detailed corporal images in Pre-Raphaelite poetry are achieved in portrayals of women. In Rossetti’s “A Last Confession,” a dying Italian patriot from the anti-Austrian uprising of 1848 recalls an image of his beloved when she was fourteen:

And as she stooped in laughing, I could see
Beneath the growing throat the breasts half-globed
Like folded lilies deepset in the stream.
Yes, let me think of her as then; for so
Her image, Father, is not like the sights
Which come when you are gone. [...]⁷⁷

The image, very accurately, refers to the attributes of the girl’s appearance and points to certain peculiarities connected with her bodily features: “She had a mouth / Made to bring death to life.”⁷⁸ The deadly power of the mouth, in Bullen’s view, is accompanied autoeroticism as the lips seem to kiss themselves: “the underlip / Sucked in, as if it strove to kiss itself.”⁷⁹ The paleness of the girl’s visage is contrasted by the darkness of her hair:

Her face was pearly pale, as when one stoops
Over wan water; and the dark crisped hair
And the hair’s shadow made it paler still:—
Deep-serried locks, the dimness of the cloud
Where the moon’s gaze is set in eddying gloom.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 154.

⁷⁸ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 154.

⁷⁹ Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body*, p. 118.

⁸⁰ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 154.

The image represents a very frequent method of comparison that consists in combining human attributes and the visual features of nature; in this case, the woman's pale face is surrounded by the "deep-serried locks," which creates an association to the moon amidst dark clouds, mentioned in the next line.

The human - natural parallel continues in the following verses, and, here, the woman's figure reminds the speaker of a tree stem:

Her body bore her neck as the tree's stem
Bears the top branch; and as the branch sustains
The flower of the year's pride, her high neck bore
That face made wonderful with night and day.⁸¹

The description does not omit any of the body parts; even the least perceptible are mentioned, like, for example, fingertips:

Her voice was swift, yet ever the last words
Fell lingeringly; and rounded finger-tips
She had, that clung a little where they touched
And then were gone o' the instant. [...] ⁸²

If the easily noticeable parts, like eyes, are described, they are segmented into smaller components:

[...] Her great eyes,
That sometimes turned half dizzily beneath
The passionate lids, as faint, when she would speak,
Had also in them hidden springs of mirth,
Which under the dark lashes evermore
Shook to her laugh, as when a bird flies low
Between the water and the willow-leaves,
And the shade quivers till he wins the light.⁸³

The dizziness of the eyes hidden under passionate lids and enfolded by shaking lashes when the woman laughs contribute to the clearly sexual aspect of this part of the description. Not only is the description visually detailed, but it is also informative in terms of the woman's character: each of the body parts brings a separate piece of information on her appearance and personality: the deadliness and narcissism of the mouth, the passion of the eye-lids and the dizziness of the eyes can be considered as contributing to the woman's overall personal profile. The particular features of the

⁸¹ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 155.

⁸² Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 155.

⁸³ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 155.

woman's countenance are also separately related to an assortment of natural phenomena, which adds to the "segmentation" of her beauty. She can be barely treated as a person but rather as a collection of body parts since each of them is carefully selected and admired one by one. The descriptive extremism has its plain foundation, namely, Rossetti's painterly inclinations; he is describing the woman as if he were painting her image.

In "Jenny," also by Rossetti, the speaker compares the details of Jenny's facial features to those found in Renaissance painting where they serve as expressions of God's work:

Fair shines the gilded aureole
In which our highest painters place
Some living woman's simple face.
And the stilled features thus descried
As Jenny's long throat droops aside, --
The shadows where the cheeks are thin,
And pure wide curve from ear to chin, --
With Raffael's, Leonardo's hand
To show them to men's souls, might stand,
Whole ages long, the whole world through,
For preachings of what God can do.⁸⁴

In this way, as David H. Riede maintains, the speaker of the poem relates the sensual appreciation to highest achievements in art.⁸⁵ Indeed, the portrayal's details bear resemblance to a description of a painting; "the stilled features" of the sleeping woman remind the speaker of an image from a canvas, and he is describing the picture with technical precision: "long throat droops aside," "shadows where the cheeks are thin," "pure wide curve from ear to chin." Accordingly, the target of the presentation seems to be a work of art, not a living creature; an artwork directly influenced by some divine intervention in its design, which is affirmed in the closing lines of the passage. With this, in Riede's assessment, "Rossetti is again showing the basis of myth in direct sensual experience."⁸⁶

Occasionally, corporal associations are triggered by images of physical objects; a fragment from Rossetti's *King's Tragedy* illustrates this practice:

With her smiling lips and her tear-bright eyes
As his arm went round her waist.

⁸⁴ Rossetti, *Poems*, pp. 155-6.

⁸⁵ David H. Riede, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Limits of Victorian Vision* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 97.

⁸⁶ Riede, *D. G. Rossetti and the Limits...*, p. 98.

And on the swell of her long fair throat
Close clung the necklet-chain

As he bent her pearl-tir'd head aside,
And in the warmth of his love and pride
He kissed her lips full fain.⁸⁷

A minute and seemingly needless detail of the necklace emphasizes the sensuality and eroticism of the image; however, the detail is not a mere visual item since it clearly builds the mood of the passage and focuses the reader's attention on a part of the sensually posed female body. The bent head, the "fair throat" and the "fain lips" with the appendage of the piece of jewellery produce a strongly pictorial image, but it is also an image powerfully inscribing itself in the structure and meaning of the poem by the emphasis on sensuality.

A comparable reference to female clothing is included in Morris's "The Eve of Crecy," even though the erotic allusion here is not as strong as in Rossetti's ballad:

GOLD on her head, and gold on her feet,
And gold where the hems of her kirtle meet,
And a golden girdle round my sweet;---
*Ah! qu'elle est belle la Marguerite.*⁸⁸

Although it is rather the beauty of the lady, paralleled with the value of gold, that the speaker foregrounds, the passage includes a unique way to express verbally a sensuous visual detail. The speaker bashfully avoids direct naming of an area of the woman's body, using an indirect expression, "where the hems of her kirtle meet," which makes the detail even more appealing both visually and erotically. The appeal is comparable to the one achieved in a portrayal of sleeping Jenny in the famous poem by Rossetti; it includes equally sensual images that are expressed in similarly veiled wording:

Why, Jenny, as I watch you there,—
For all your wealth of loosened hair,
Your silk ungirdled and unlac'd
And warm sweets open to the waist,⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets*, p. 127.

⁸⁸ Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere*..., p. 166.

⁸⁹ Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, *Poems: A New Edition* (London: Strangeways, 1881), p. 117.

The speaker is watching the sleeping prostitute and focusing his attention on the detail of undone garments and loosened hair; his desire is revealed openly by the reflection on the “warm sweets.” Although from a psychological perspective, the desire may be called “narcissistic,” arising from “the libido itself,”⁹⁰ as J. B. Bullen maintains, its source is the physical attractiveness of the female body.

Sensual expression reaches its extreme levels in the detailed description of Lizzie being harassed by goblins in Christina Rossetti’s *Goblin Market*:

Lizzie uttered not a word;
Would not open lip from lip
Lest they should cram a mouthful in;
But laughed in heart to feel the drip
Of juice that syruiped all her face,
And lodged in dimples of her chin,
And streaked her neck which quaked like curd.⁹¹

The scene shows Lizzie’s act of resistance to the temptation, that is, tasting the forbidden fruit given to her by the goblins. The act, as she believes, will redeem her sister, Laura, who had previously yielded to the enticement; consequently, Lizzie manages not to eat the fruits, but their juices cover her body. The detailed portrayal of the trickles of syrup on the girl’s face and neck in the two last lines of the passage divert the reader’s attention from the spiritual connotation of the act – resisting the temptation of the forbidden fruit – to a purely sensual meaning. In fact, the detail creates a whole new theme in the reading of the poem, introducing a *double entendre*: Lizzie’s sacrifice to save her sister’s life evokes sexual undertones; significantly enough, many critics have pointed to “voluptuous imagery”⁹² of the passage and the fact that “Laura is saved by Lizzie’s painful resistance to the temptations of passion symbolized by the fruit.”⁹³

* * *

In the already discussed “A Last Confession,” the bodily, in a few images, is expressed with the use of natural similes, that is, the rhetorical figures based on relationships of comparison or resemblance. However, it is possible to find passages of Pre-Raphaelite poetry in which the carnal and the natural form closer bonds –

⁹⁰ J. B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 70.

⁹¹ C. Rossetti, *The Poetical Works...*, p. 7.

⁹² Anthony H. Harrison, “Love and Betrayal” in *Christina Rossetti in Context*, in: *The Victorian Web*, ed. George P. Landow, July 2000, March 2006, <<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/crossetti/harrison2/4.6.html>>.

⁹³ Lesa Scholl, “Fallen or Forbidden: Rossetti’s ‘Goblin Market’” in: *The Victorian Web*, ed. George P. Landow, December 2003, March 2006, <<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/crossetti/scholl.html>>.

verses that offer cases of perceptual intermingling between detailed natural and bodily images. The interconnection is evident, for instance, in a series of details appearing in “Silent Noon”; the natural particulars form here a clear correlation with those concerning human lovers who contemplate the surroundings during an idyllic encounter:

Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass,—
 The finger-points look through like rosy blooms:
 Your eyes smile peace. The pasture gleams and
 ‘Neath billowing skies that scatter and amass.
 All round our nest, far as the eye can pass,
 Are golden kingcup-fields with silver edge
 Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorn-hedge.
 ‘Tis visible silence, still as the hour-glass.
 Deep in the sun-searched growths the dragon-fly
 Hangs like a blue thread loosened from the sky:—
 So this wing’d hour is dropt to us from above.
 Oh! clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower,
 This close-companioned inarticulate hour
 When twofold silence was the song of love.⁹⁴

The poet spotlights the details of both the human body and of the milieu, producing in this way a peculiar union of carnality and the perceived nature. Sensory detail in the passage is limited to the one concerning visual perception owing to the emphasis on silence: the “visible silence” represented by kingcup fields, cow-parsley and the dragonfly noiselessly hiding in the growths. All the images appear in the lovers’ vicinity, that is, within the reach of their sight: “far as the eye can pass.” In the face of restricted aural perception, the visual one is all the more sharpened, and the lovers easily distinguish the particular details of the surroundings.

A similar situation, an erotic encounter in a natural milieu, is captured in Morris’s “The Wind.” Here, the poet gradually builds up the atmosphere of a sensual experience to finally focus on a natural detail which comes in direct contact with the body:

I kiss’d her hard by the ear, and she kiss’d me on the brow,
 And then lay down on the grass, where the mark on the moss is now,
 And spread her arms out wide while I went down below.
Wind, wind! thou art sad, art thou kind?
Wind, wind, unhappy! thou art blind,
Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find.
 And then I walk’d for a space to and fro on the side of the hill,
 Till I gather’d and held in my arms great sheaves of the daffodil,

⁹⁴ Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets*, p. 181.

And when I came again my Margaret lay there still.
I piled them high and high above her heaving breast,
How they were caught and held in her loose ungirded vest!
But one beneath her arm died, happy so to be prest!⁹⁵

The bodily details open the passage, and they are followed by references to elements of nature: the lily-seed from the refrain and the daffodils gathered by the male lover to please the woman. Particularisation occurs in the closing lines of the quotation where the sheaves of daffodils are replaced by one particular flower that is crumpled under the woman's arm; this process of focusing is accompanied by a corporal reference to the female body and attire (i.e. "loose ungirded vest"). The visualization procedure is geared at creating a strongly erotic connotation: through the extensive use of detail, the speaker draws the reader's attention to the sexual act itself (in the image of "the mark on the moss" which is an imprint of the pair's bodies) and the particular parts of the female body. The man's satisfaction about the tête-à-tête with his beloved is transferred to the detail of the crushed daffodil that seems to "be happy" with the fact that it died in direct contact with the woman's body.

A different, this time female perspective on bodily connection with nature is given in Morris's *Sir Peter Harpdon's End*. Lady Alice de la Barde, located at the Hotel de la Barde in Bordeaux, is dreaming of Avalon, a place of her recurrent imaginings. The image of the self-indulgent woman resting in natural surroundings is beset with details of both bodily and natural character, and again the particulars interact:

Lying so, one kiss,
And I should be in Avalon asleep,
Among the poppies and the yellow flowers;
And they should brush my cheek, my hair being spread
Far out among the stems; soft mice and small
Eating and creeping all about my feet,
Red shod and tired; and the flies should come
Creeping o'er my broad eyelids unafraid;
And there should be a noise of water going,
Clear blue, fresh water breaking on the slates,
Likewise the flies should creep - God's eyes! God help!
A trumpet? I will run fast, leap adown
The slippery sea-stairs, where the crabs fight.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Morris, *Selected Poems*, p. 70.

⁹⁶ Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere...*, p. 99.

The interconnection, in this case, bears traces of unsightliness rather than natural or bodily beauty. The change of perspective – from the male to the female – completely changes the focus of such descriptions: it is no longer aimed at sexuality and corporal beauty. The images of creeping mice and flies do not conventionally connote attractiveness, but they are not used thereto: they represent the woman's desires and her idea of pleasure derived from the contact with nature. The enjoyment surfaces in the details of the flowers brushing her cheeks, the spread hair, the softness of mice touching her feet, the delicate touch of flies on the eyelids and the sound of water. The picture is completed by a barely noticeable detail of red shoes that she is wearing in her daydream, which, parenthetically, is a perfect example of the poet's attention to detail in verbal accounts.

All three instances of the poetic union between the natural and the carnal are primarily aimed at emphasising the power of human senses, but whereas the first example concerns mainly sight and hearing, the remaining two emphasise the sense of touch. It does not mean, however, that Morris's portrayals, in comparison with Rossetti's, lack visual value: they merely include a speaker who assumes a different viewpoint in terms of his/her receptivity; from the reader's perspective, the careful enumeration of smallest natural and bodily details allows for visualisation that is equally potent in all the discussed extracts.

* * *

The devotion to sensuous detail in the verbal form assumes a new dimension in Morris's work, "Praise of my Lady," which is a presentation of the physical features of a woman with much attention paid to the smallest body parts. No section of the poem is free of clear bodily associations:

My lady seems of ivory
Forehead, straight nose, and cheeks that be
Hollowed a little mournfully.
Beata mea Domina!
Her forehead, overshadowed much
By bows of hair, has a wave such
As God was good to make for me.
Beata mea Domina!
Not greatly long my lady's hair,
Nor yet with yellow color fair,
But thick and crisped wonderfully:
Beata mea Domina!
Heavy to make the pale face sad,
And dark, but dead as though it had

Been forged by God most wonderfully
 Beata mea Domina!
 Of some strange metal, thread by thread,
 To stand out from my lady's head,
 Not moving much to tangle me.
 Beata mea Domina!
 Beneath her brows the lids fall slow,
 The lashes a clear shadow throw
 Where I would wish my lips to be.
 Beata mea Domina!
 Her great eyes, standing far apart,
 Draw up some memory from her heart,
 And gaze out very mournfully;
 Beata mea Domina!
 So beautiful and kind they are,
 But most times looking out afar,
 Waiting for something, not for me.
 Beata mea Domina!
 I wonder if the lashes long
 Are those that do her bright eyes wrong,
 For always half tears seem to be
 Beata mea Domina!
 Lurking below the underlid,
 Darkening the place where they lie hid:
 If they should rise and flow for me!
 Beata mea Domina!
 Her full lips being made to kiss,
 Curled up and pensive each one is;
 This makes me faint to stand and see.
 Beata mea Domina!
 Her lips are not contented now,
 Because the hours pass so slow
 Towards a sweet time: (pray for me),
 Beata mea Domina!
 Nay, hold thy peace! for who can tell?
 But this at least I know full well,
 Her lips are parted longingly,
 Beata mea Domina!
 So passionate and swift to move,
 To pluck at any flying love,
 That I grow faint to stand and see.
 Beata mea Domina!
 Yea! there beneath them is her chin,
 So fine and round, it were a sin
 To feel no weaker when I see
 Beata mea Domina!
 God's dealings; for with so much care
 And troublous, faint lines wrought in there,
 He finishes her face for me.
 Beata mea Domina!
 Of her long neck what shall I say?
 What things about her body's sway,
 Like a knight's pennon or slim tree
 Beata mea Domina!

Set gently waving in the wind;
 Or her long hands that I may find
 On some day sweet to move o'er me?
 Beata mea Domina!
 God pity me though, if I missed
 The telling, how along her wrist
 The veins creep, dying languidly
 Beata mea Domina!
 Inside her tender palm and thin.
 Now give me pardon, dear, wherein
 My voice is weak and vexes thee.
 Beata mea Domina!
 All men that see her any time,
 I charge you straightly in this rhyme,
 What, and wherever you may be,
 Beata mea Domina!
 To kneel before her; as for me
 I choke and grow quite faint to see
 My lady moving graciously.
 Beata mea Domina!⁹⁷

In comparison with Rossetti's "A Last Confession," Morris's representation of female beauty is equally sensual and detailed: the poet goes as far as to point to the lady's veins visible under the skin of her palms ("[...] how along her wrist / The veins creep, dying languidly / [...] Inside her tender palm and thin."); the speaker is also strongly beguiled by the woman. The clearest difference between Rossetti's and Morris's portrayals of women is that the former associates the bodily features with the natural whereas the latter constantly refers to the sacred, which is especially evident in the refrain and in various references to God. Therefore, for Morris, the beauty of the particular body parts is clearly a result of divine intervention. The poems differ also in the mood the female figures manifest: the eroticism of Rossetti's portrayal is "concentrated in [the woman's] laughter"⁹⁸ while Morris's lady shows signs of sadness and mournfulness. The dissimilarity can be most distinctly spotted in the images of the eyes: "the passionate lids" from "A Last Confession" have to be set against the eyes that "gaze out mournfully" with tears "Lurking below the underlid" in "Praise of My Lady."

Another example of a corporeal image that is not necessarily associated with sexuality surfaces in a representation of oldness taken from Morris's "Old Love." The passionate eyes and lips "being made to kiss" from purely erotic portrayals are contrasted here by cheeks that "Are not so good for kissing now." Sir Giles, whose

⁹⁷ Morris, *Selected Poems*, pp. 77-80.

⁹⁸ Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body*, p. 118.

smile “Creased his dry skin with many a fold,”⁹⁹ reflects on the experience of a meeting with a duchess, an old acquaintance of his:

And she, she was changed more; her hair
Before my eyes that used to swim,

And make me dizzy with great bliss
Once, when I used to watch her sit —
Her hair is bright still, yet it is
As though some dust were thrown on it.
Her eyes are shallower, as though
Some grey glass were behind; her brow
And cheeks the straining bones show through,
Are not so good for kissing now.¹⁰⁰

The speaker points to the details of the woman’s countenance to notice the changes that have occurred in time. The hair, the eyes, the brow and cheeks show typical features of a mature physique; yet, the most striking is the image of bones straining through the cheeks. The unsightliness of the human body in a far more radical expression – an image of a corpse – is also included in Rossetti’s poetic journal written during a journey to France and Belgium. In one of its parts, “Poem at the Paris Station,” the poet reflects on an experience of looking at a dead body recovered from the Seine:

In France (to baffle thieves and murderers)
A journey takes two days of passport work
At least. The plan’s sometimes a tedious one,
But bears its fruit. Because, the other day,
In passing by the Morgue, we saw a man
(The thing is common, and we never should
Have known of it, only we passed that way)
Who had been stabbed and tumbled in the Seine,
Where he had stayed some days. The face was black,
And, like a negro’s, swollen; all the flesh
Had furred, and broken into a green mould.
Now, very likely, he who did the job
Was standing among those who stood with us,
To look upon the corpse. You fancy him—
Smoking an early pipe, and watching, as
An artist, the effect of his last work.
This always if it had not struck him that
‘Twere best to leave while yet the body took
Its crust of rot beneath the Seine.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere*..., p. 155.

¹⁰⁰ Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere*..., p. 157.

¹⁰¹ Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Ellis, 1911), p. 182.

Although this part of the poem was evaluated by R. L. Stein as “a glimpse of reality in its starkest form,”¹⁰² the unsightly details of the dead man’s body are not a target of the poet’s reflections; they serve as a trigger to think about the murderer, possibly also an onlooker of the corpse. Indeed “[i]t might be a passage from Baudelaire,”¹⁰³ but neither the French Decadent poet nor Rossetti can be accused of promoting realism; for the Pre-Raphaelite, the actuality is employed merely on the basis of its visual value.

* * *

In the presented examples of detailed images of human body, the prevailing theme concerns the sensuousness of carnal depictions. The speakers’ love and desire surface in elaborate and comprehensive reflections on the physicality of the beloved; in the extreme forms, the accounts turn into meticulous descriptions of the female body part after part, as in the case of “A Last Confession.” The beauty described in such a way can also be associated with an emotion of a religious kind (“In Praise...”). The deep erotic sensuality of works like “A Last Confession” or “Goblin Market” is juxtaposed with equally particularized representations of the human body but situated in more universal contexts, like the passage of time or death. The speakers’ attitudes clearly lack devotion or appreciation of such unsightly views: the image of the corpse from Rossetti’s poetic report resembles rather a factual, journalistic account than an elevated description of a body. The corporal details, therefore, are not restricted to the eroticised representations; such particulars can also serve as visual prompts used in reflections of a non-erotic nature. On the whole, enhancing sensuality at the level of the text’s meaning disproves the theories of the poetic details’ irrelevance: the particulars precisely point to corporality as a significant connotation in a reading of the poem.

D. THE NATURAL DETAIL AS A REFERENCE TO VISUAL PERCEPTION

Pre-Raphaelitism is often considered to take delight in the natural detail; although this opinion concerns mainly painting, the descriptions of nature in poetry also abound in visual particulars. What is more, such depictions are not merely ornamental, but, owing to their pictorial orientation, they validate the prominence of visual perception in the poetic discourse. The following illustrations of this

¹⁰² Richard L. Stein, *The Ritual of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 208.

¹⁰³ Stein, *The Ritual...*, p. 208.

significance of visuality range from elaborate poetic landscapes to single particles of the natural world, demonstrating also the variety of techniques used by Pre-Raphaelite poets in their attempts at achieving the visual in the verbal.

Rossetti's eye for natural detail reveals itself in the already mentioned journal from the trip to France and Belgium. In a poem from this series, "Boulogne To Amiens And Paris," the speaker appears as a traveller who is observing a view outside the train window:

Strong extreme speed, that the brain hurries with,
Further than trees, and hedges, and green grass
Whitened by distance,—further than small pools
Held among fields and gardens,—further than
Haystacks and windmill-sails and roofs and herds,—
The sea's last margin ceases at the sun.¹⁰⁴

Despite the circumstances – namely, the speed of the train – the description accurately lists the elements of the landscape that are passing outside the window. The speaker is conscious of the ephemerality of his observation: he mentions the "extreme speed, that the brain hurries with" and the horizon that finally vanishes over the sea. The act of looking occupies the central position of the poem's imagery. In addition, like in the previous example, the description of the landscape abounds in optical effects: the greenness of grass seems to be whitened in remote observation since colours fade when they are seen from a distance. In the next stanza, the speaker focuses on the changeability of the views and mentions, self-reflectively, the limit of his vision: the window frame gets "shut" by the trees, which blurs the picture:

The sea has left us, but the sun remains.
Sometimes the country spreads aloof in tracts
Smooth from the harvest; sometimes sky and land
Are shut from the square space the window leaves
By a dense crowd of trees, stem behind stem

Passing across each other as we pass:
Sometimes tall poplar-wands stand white, their heads
Outmeasuring the distant hills. Sometimes
The ground has a deep greenness; sometimes brown
In stubble; and sometimes no ground at all,
For the close strength of crops that stand unreaped.
The water-plots are sometimes all the sun's,—
Sometimes quite green through shadows filling them,
Or islanded with growths of reeds,—or else
Masked in grey dust like the wide face o' the fields.

¹⁰⁴ Rossetti, *The Works...*, pp. 177-8.

And still the swiftness lasts; that to our speed
The trees seem shaken like a press of spears.¹⁰⁵

The detailed pictoriality of the passage reveals itself in two realms: in the visual effects that the swift and distant observation brings as well as in the intense use of colours. As far as the former is concerned, the speaker mentions the trees that seem to outmeasure the distant hills. The ground apparently disappears under the unreaped crops; the reeds form islands on the water plots; finally, the speed makes the trees appear like a “press of spears.” As to the colours, the poet offers a selection of them, ranging from the natural whiteness of the poplar-wands, the ground’s greenness and the brownness of stubble, to the colours that are produced by the reflections in the water: the sunshine yellow, the greenness from shadows and the dust-greyness of the fields. The ensuing stanzas draw the reader’s attention to the train’s interior, which is presented with equal precision, to subsequently return to the views outside the windows:

There is some count of us:—folks travelling-capped,
Priesthood, and lank hard-featured soldiery,
Females (no women), blouses, Hunt, and I.
We are relayed at Amiens. The steam
Snorts, chafes, and bridles, like three-hundred horse,
And flings its dusky mane upon the air.
Our company is thinned, and lamps alight:
But still there are the folks in travelling-caps—
No priesthood now, but always soldiery,
And babies to make up for show in noise,
Females (no women), blouses, Hunt, and I.
Our windows at one side are shut for warmth;
Upon the other side, a leaden sky,
Hung in blank glare, makes all the country dim,
Which too seems bald and meagre,—be it truth,
Or of the waxing darkness. Here and there
The shade takes light, where in thin patches stand
The unstirred dregs of water.¹⁰⁶

The gallery of co-travellers, introduced by the looks and by profession, is interspersed with the details of the train engines’ work. The internal milieu, however, seems to be of lesser interest to Rossetti than the exterior, that is, the dim countryside with patches of lightness and the dregs of water.

¹⁰⁵ Rossetti, *The Works...*, p. 178.

¹⁰⁶ Rossetti, *The Works...*, p. 178.

As it turns out, the pace of the train does not hinder detailed perception, and Rossetti is clearly inspired by the sense of speed introduced by railway travel; yet, as Riede notes, the poems written during his journey (like the one discussed above) reveal also the limits of Pre-Raphaelite “truth to nature.”¹⁰⁷ Although preceded by a quotation from a different part of the poetic journal, Riede’s assessment accurately evaluates the poem analysed above:

The various items in the landscape are given with as much fidelity as possible, and with minimal commentary, so that the poetry is akin to twentieth-century imagism. But the description clearly differs from anything that might be offered in a Pre-Raphaelite painting. In painting, the close attention to detail inevitably forced the artist to record everything in stasis, not as the eye perceives the scene, but as the patient brush records all that the eye might dwell upon *if* it could focus on everything at once and *if* the world would only stand still. Rossetti’s verse records not nature, but perception, and reflects an impressionistic rather than a purely mimetic art—in verse, at least, he was closer to Turner than to Holman Hunt.¹⁰⁸

This passage is indebted to another, more general, opinion on Rossetti’s “realism”: Stein, who also marries Rossetti’s verse with impressionist painting, points to the “painter’s eye” emerging in the poet’s writing:

The world is seen as a collection of partial glimpses. Perception is the only reality. The whole of experience is a composite portrait of those aspects of life that find material expression from moment to moment. This is Rossetti’s most radical poetic fusion of imagination and reality, as well as his finest account of the way in which experience is apprehended. It is achieved not through the creation of a powerful imaginary world but through a total immersion in sensation. Feelings, ideas, or abstractions of any sort only exist—at least at the end of this series of poetic fragments—insofar as they are embodied in tangible facts. Indeed, all forms of experience are reduced to the visible, the clearest sign that this modernism is linked to Rossetti’s imaginative legacy as a painter.¹⁰⁹

According to the same critic, in Rossetti’s poetry, “[c]onsciousness itself seems to dissolve into a sequence of perceptual moments, as in the succession of views from the window of the moving train.”¹¹⁰ This observation applies also to the landscape from the abovementioned poem: each of the perceptual moments encompasses a separate detail of the countryside; the poem becomes a tribute to visual sensitivity, its ephemerality and acuteness. Rossetti indeed “records perception,” but he also brings

¹⁰⁷ David G. Riede, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti Revisited* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), pp. 46-7.

¹⁰⁸ Riede, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti Revisited*, p. 47.

¹⁰⁹ Stein, *The Ritual...* pp. 207-8.

¹¹⁰ Stein, *The Ritual...* p. 209.

poetry closer to painting: while recording the particulars in verse, the poet forms a cohesive overall description. He does it in the same way as a painter, image by image, creates a visual work of art which also requires a gradual “reading” by the viewer.

The emphasis on perception prevails as the core issue in Pre-Raphaelite representations of nature. In Rossetti’s “Woodspurge,” the speaker’s flow of thoughts is interrupted by a sudden visual revelation connected with the surrounding natural scenery: he notices a three-cupped woodspurge:

The wind flapped loose, the wind was still,
Shaken out dead from tree and hill:
I had walked on at the wind’s will,—
I sat now, for the wind was still.
Between my knees my forehead was,—
My lips, drawn in, said not Alas!
My hair was over in the grass,
My naked ears heard the day pass.
My eyes, wide open, had the run
Of some ten weeds to fix upon;
Among those few, out of the sun,
The woodspurge flowered, three cups in one.¹¹¹

As McGann explains, the poet gives himself completely up to “his environmental stimuli,”¹¹² becoming submissive to the external impulses of nature. In Holberg’s view, his “senses are enjoying a sort of autonomy,”¹¹³ being absorbed by objects unrelated to the intellectual meaning of the moment. The woodspurge becomes a seemingly irrelevant detail that serves as a remedy to the speaker’s sadness.¹¹⁴ Its three cups are noticed at an epiphanic moment as a wonder of nature, and, consequently, the observation distracts the subject’s flow of thoughts and moves it to the realm of world natural mysteries. The peculiarity of the triple division of the flower’s cup, as McGann asserts, does not bear religious meanings and remains free of any symbolic connotations.¹¹⁵ Moreover, the exactness of detail additionally emphasizes the significance of mere perception that is devoid of any additional knowledge:

From perfect grief there need not be
Wisdom or even memory:

¹¹¹ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 251.

¹¹² McGann, “Rossetti’s Significant Details,” p. 234.

¹¹³ Stanley M. Holberg, “Rossetti and the Trance,” *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 8 (1970) p. 302.

¹¹⁴ McGann, “Rossetti’s Significant Details,” p. 234.

¹¹⁵ McGann, “Rossetti’s Significant Details,” p. 234.

One thing then learnt remains to me,—
The woodspurge has a cup of three.¹¹⁶

In fact, the observation that the flower is composed of three cups becomes the only fact that the speaker concentrates on. The absorption in this particular detail does not only shift the woodspurge to the central position among the other “weeds” he is looking at, but the concentration on the detail also establishes the nucleus of the poem’s meaning: the notion of pure pleasure derived from the sensory contact with the beauty of nature. According to Riede, the poem is primarily about the act of seeing itself; yet, at the same time, the critic claims that the work represents “a poetry of nonstatement” which describes a fact that “suggests nothing, means nothing.”¹¹⁷ On the contrary, it means a lot: the poem exposes the fact that one is able to experience simple sensory incidents without reaching to any “unapprehended reality beyond itself,”¹¹⁸ without symbolism attached. In general, “Woodspurge,” like the previously discussed work, offers a feast of perception possible to occur owing to Rossetti’s persistence on the visual detail.

William Morris is an equally skilful poet as far as the precision in the expression of natural detail is concerned. In the narrative *Concerning Geffray Teste Noire*, he describes, with the minutest particulars, the impression that Verville wood gives:

And so we enter’d Verville wood next day,
In the afternoon; through it the highway runs,
‘Twixt copses of green hazel, very thick,
And underneath, with glimmering of suns,
The primroses are happy; the dews lick
The soft green moss. [...] ¹¹⁹

In this case, the visualization is strengthened by the antropomorphisation of the primroses and dew: the former is described as “happy” and the latter as “licking” the moss. Both depictions convey visual impressions of delicacy and ephemerality that are achieved through the poet’s “zooming in” on the primroses and the drops of dew. Such a photographic technique in poetic expression was used also by Christina Rossetti in a description of the sunset in *Goblin Market*:

¹¹⁶ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 251.

¹¹⁷ Riede, *D. G. Rossetti and the Limits...*, p. 57.

¹¹⁸ Riede, *D. G. Rossetti and the Limits...*, p. 57.

¹¹⁹ Morris, *Selected Poems*, pp.53-54.

The stars rise, the moon bends her arc,
Each glow-worm winks her spark,¹²⁰

The sudden close up on a glow-worm from the spatially distant stars and the moon is even more radical than in Morris's case. The examples of such focalised, tiny elements of nature are countless in the body of Pre-Raphaelite poetry, but rarely is their visual value so strongly emphasised and the technique of focusing so evident as in Christina Rossetti's poem.

Particularisation leads in the straight line to pictoriality, which conclusion recurs throughout the argument, but, in this case, the pictoriality of poetic representation reaches its extreme level: not only do the poets reflect on the visual but also try to analyse the vision itself, to fathom the mechanisms of human perception. In most of the examples, nature serves as an eternal mystery and forms a target for visual admiration. The particularisation techniques vary: from the descriptions of minutest details, like in the last quoted work, through concentration on a single particular (like in "Woodspurge"), to extreme cases in which particularisation consists in the meticulous presentation of the features of a landscape. It becomes clear that the achievement of strongly visual, detailed images is not always conditioned by the size of the portrayed items but rather by the level of attention devoted to each of them in a poetic account – the poet's care to *show* a given particular to the reader.

E. VISUAL DRAMATISATION OF HUMAN ACTIONS

Let us return once again to Lessing's famous claim that "bodies [...] are the peculiar objects of painting," and "actions [are] the peculiar subjects of poetry,"¹²¹ used as the argument to make a distinction between the two arts. The actions obviously require agents, i.e. "bodies," to which they are joined, and owing to that fact, poetry *indirectly* describes the bodies.¹²² The assumption undoubtedly creates a link between the arts; the only unsettling part of it is the adverb "indirectly" which appears to be a relic of the traditional treatment of poetic representation (as it is explained in the previous chapter). A restatement of Lessing's assumption equals the assertion that apart from describing actions, poetry also describes bodies; in other

¹²⁰ C. Rossetti, *The Poetical Works...*, p. 4.

¹²¹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: As Essay Upon the Limits of Poetry and Painting*, trans. E. Frothingham (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 1766), p. 91; quoted in Mitchell, *Iconology...*, p. 101.

¹²² Mitchell, *Iconology...*, p. 101.

words, it describes bodies *in* action. This does not imply, however, that the fact alone makes poetry visual: what is needed here is a satisfactory number of visualising devices like descriptions of the background or the milieu and, most of all, a detailed approach to the actions themselves. Therefore, in order to achieve pictoriality of the actions expressed in poetry, one needs visual particularisation.

The leading example of the detailed expression of actions in Pre-Raphaelite poetry is Rossetti's "My Sister's Sleep." Defending the significance of Rossetti's details, Jerome McGann defies the religious value of the particulars of the milieu in the poem and claims that,

Rossetti's art here is highly self-conscious: he wants us to seek and fail to find the religious "meaning" in his stanza, and failing to find it, to recognize the purely sensational value of the lines. By this we are brought to an unexpected experience. Phenomena – things, people, places, images – are restored to a kind of innocence. Saved from their overlay of traditional symbolism, the items of experience can again be, as it were, simply themselves. [...]

Significance is in the sensation, and the "idea" redeemed by the poem is exactly that. In this way does the poem so effectively evoke the feeling of grief: Rossetti keeps the scene uncontaminated by intellectual significances, emphasizes its sensational aspects, thence the emotional drama, and ultimately the fundamentally affective quality of the mother's and son's thoughts.¹²³

Devoid of the symbolic value, the details serve the viscosity of the text with double impact: they "are themselves" and, thus, do not mean anything else. Still, they are employed for a purpose – to build up the atmosphere of "the emotional drama" of the mother's misery connected with her daughter's death. The dramatic scene is being watched by her son, the speaker of the poem:

She fell asleep on Christmas Eve:
At length the long-ungranted shade
Of weary eyelids overweigh'd
The pain nought else might yet relieve.

Our mother, who had leaned all day
Over the bed from chime to chime,
Then raised herself for the first time,
And as she sat her down, did pray.¹²⁴

Holberg maintains that the emotional state of the speaker hinders any rational thinking, giving way to acute perceptions only; however, the perceptions are random

¹²³ McGann, "Rossetti's Significant Details," p. 233.

¹²⁴ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 138.

and chaotic, making the specified details appear irrelevant.¹²⁵ This conclusion is similar to McGann's: "The things that he observes are neither interesting nor significant conceptually and can, as I have suggested, be thought of simply as providing atmosphere."¹²⁶ Indeed, having set up the scene, the speaker draws the reader's attention to the milieu which is apparently unimportant, auxiliary to the event that is taking place:

Her little work-table was spread
With work to finish. For the glare
Made by her candle, she had care
To work some distance from the bed.

Without, there was a cold moon up,
Of winter radiance sheer and thin;
The hollow halo it was in
Was like an icy crystal cup.

Through the small room, with subtle sound
Of flame, by vents the fire shine drove
And reddened. In its dim alcove
The mirror shed a clearness round.¹²⁷

The insignificance of the background appears deceptive as the milieu is composed of several important props in the drama: the table with unfinished handiwork, the candle standing on it, the moon outside the window, the fireplace and the mirror reflecting the moon. After some self-reflection, the speaker, the dying girl's brother, returns to the image of the mother:

Our mother rose from where she sat:
Her needles, as she laid them down,
Met lightly, and her silken gown
Settled: no other noise than that.¹²⁸

The images of the needles, which are put away on the table, and the mother's silk gown, which settles when she stands up, introduce an impression of complete silence in the room and, consequently, emphasise tension. Yet, the quietness breaks off suddenly when the clock strikes a quarter past midnight, and the reader is surprised with a remark on the time of action, the Christmas day:

¹²⁵ Holberg, "Rossetti and the Trance," p. 303.

¹²⁶ Holberg, "Rossetti and the Trance," p. 304.

¹²⁷ Rossetti, *Poems*, pp. 138-9.

¹²⁸ Rossetti, *Poems*, p. 139.

Just then in the room over us
 There was a pushing back of chairs,
 As some who had sat unawares
 So late, now heard the hour, and rose.

 With anxious softly-stepping haste
 Our mother went where Margaret lay,
 Fearing the sounds o'erhead—should they
 Have broken her long watched-for rest!

 She stooped an instant, calm, and turned;
 But suddenly turned back again;
 And all her features seemed in pain
 With woe, and her eyes gazed and yearned.

 For my part, I but hid my face,
 And held my breath, and spoke no word:
 There was none spoken; but I heard
 The silence for a little space.

 Our mother bowed herself and wept:
 And both my arms fell, and I said,
 'God knows I knew that she was dead.'
 And there, all white, my sister slept.

 Then kneeling, upon Christmas morn
 A little after twelve o'clock
 We said, ere the first quarter struck,
 'Christ's blessing on the newly born!'¹²⁹

In this poem, particularisation is achieved not so much in the detailed description of physical objects but in the accurate presentation of actions, and this makes the scene all the more dramatic. The mother's "anxious softly-stepping haste," the nervous turning to and fro as well as the speaker's hidden face and held breath signify the fact that the girl died; the fact is eventually confirmed by the mother's weeping and the image of the pale body of the deceased. McGann notices the unreligious connotation of the would-be devout elements in the poem, but what is also evident is the irony of the last line of the work: the clash between the celebration of Christ's birth and the death of the child. On the whole, the visualization of the milieu accompanied by the precise portrayal of actions in the poem is aimed at the dramatisation of the described scene.

Dramatisation as a function of detailed imagery can also be discerned in Christina Rossetti's and in Morris's works. In "Goblin Market," the aforementioned attempts of the goblins at making Lizzie eat the vile fruit involve a series of actions through which the creatures harass her:

¹²⁹ Rossetti, *Poems*, pp. 140-1.

Their tones waxed loud,
 Their looks were evil.
 Lashing their tails
 They trod and hustled her,
 Elbowed and jostled her,
 Clawed with their nails,
 Barking, mewling, hissing, mocking,
 Tore her gown and soiled her stocking,
 Twitched her hair out by the roots,
 Stamped upon her tender feet,
 Held her hands and squeezed their fruits
 Against her mouth to make her eat.
 [...]

Though the goblins cuffed and caught her,
 Coaxed and fought her,
 Bullied and besought her,
 Scratched her, pinched her black as ink,
 Kicked and knocked her,
 Mauled and mocked her,¹³⁰

Some of the enumerated deeds seem redundant as they can be treated as synonymous with others, but what is achieved through the repetition is a dramatic effect that emphasises the goblins' brutality. The visual outcome is Lizzie's chaotic, vigorous and harsh fight with the creatures; the detailed listing helps the reader visualize the complexity of the particular acts of cruelty committed by the goblins.

Even crueller is the image of Robert's death in Morris's "The Haystack in the Floods." The passage, which was already discussed in a different context, offers a realistic portrayal of an act of violence; its essence is the detailed enumeration of military equipment, aggressive acts and their consequences:

[...] With a start
 Up Godmar rose, thrust them apart;
 From Robert's throat he loosed the bands
 Of silk and mail; with empty hands
 Held out, she stood and gazed, and saw
 The long bright blade without a flaw
 Glide out from Godmar's sheath, his hand
 In Robert's hair, she saw him bend
 Back Robert's head; she saw him send
 The thin steel down; the blow told well,
 Right backward the knight Robert fell,
 And moaned as dogs do, being half dead,
 Unwitting, as I deem: so then
 Godmar turn'd grinning to his men,
 Who ran, some five or six, and beat
 His head to pieces at their feet.¹³¹

¹³⁰ C. Rossetti, *The Poetical Works...*, pp. 6-7.

¹³¹ Morris, *Selected Poems*, pp. 50-51.

Morris focuses on the physical details of the scene, but, contrary to Rossetti in “My Sister’s Sleep,” he does not provide the reader with too much information on the psychological reactions of the participants; in this way, the poet is reducing the dramatic effect but amplifying the visual one. The poem brings also emphasized images of the heroine’s, Jehane’s, actions during the events leading up to Robert’s decapitation:

She laid her hand upon her brow,
Then gazed upon the palm, as though
She thought her forehead bled, and--"No!"
She said, and turn'd her head away,

[...]
A wicked smile
Wrinkled her face, her lips grew thin,
A long way out she thrust her chin.¹³²

The first passage portrays Jehane’s reaction to the ultimatum issued by Godmar, the killer: either she stays with him or Robert is killed. The gestures the woman makes resemble dramatic poses from theatrical performances, and this produces the visual effect of the account. The second extract comes a few lines later and presents the woman’s reaction to Godmar’s drawing a perspective for her future life with him in a nearby castle after killing Robert. The mimic reaction to the dramatic choice Jehane has to make is followed by her promise to kill Godmar in such circumstances. The gesture hints at the wickedness of her pledge and also introduces the psychological response which the previous scene lacked. Both images of Jehane are aimed at picturing her as a heroine of a visual drama, almost a theatre performance.

As the above examples show, pictoriality in poetry can be achieved as a result of the precise presentation of human actions. Visuality, in such a case, originates mainly in the dramatisation of actions, which, in turn, is triggered by the “emotional drama” of the characters. In this way, a logical line of interrelation is established: emotion, an inherent component of poetic expression, through its physical manifestation, action, can surface in the poetic discourse as a visual image. However, the necessary condition for the visualisation of the inherently poetic feature is the meticulousness of expression.

¹³² Morris, *Selected Poems*, p. 49.

* * *

The poetic detail appears to be a compelling pictorial device regardless of the type of image it is used in – a physical object, a natural view or the human body. The particularisation techniques also vary only slightly among the specific spheres. They can be summarised with the use of a spectrum: one of its extremes is represented by a single detail expressed with different degrees of meticulousness, and the other pole of the continuum is occupied by images presenting multiple details (for instance, elements of the surroundings or the human body) in abundantly particularised descriptions. In the poems mentioned above, the employment of the two extremes along with the whole range of intermediate techniques of particularisation has two principal results: the achievement of pictoriality in poetry and the validation of the details' relevance. The outcomes, nevertheless, can only be achieved owing to a range of purposes the details fulfil: enhancing sensuality and eroticism, introducing dramatic effects, but most of all, due to the functions connected with visuality: emphasising the significance of human perception and introducing optical effects which are transformed into the poetic language. As a consequence, the poetic detail can be treated as a principal route in the studies of the visual qualities of poetry.

CONCLUSION

Pre-Raphaelitism in art and literature is in many respects regarded as a foreshadowing of Modernism. Rossetti, in his creation of mood and inclusion of psychological analysis in poetry, heralds the techniques and concerns of Imagism,¹ and his experiments with consciousness and phenomenology are combined with a devotion to an idea of the image as a compact and revelatory expression of a state or feeling (an idea comparable to the Modernist “epiphany”). Pre-Raphaelitism in poetry had a major influence upon the writers of the Decadence, and on Gerard Manley Hopkins and William Butler Yeats, who were also influenced by Ruskin and visual Pre-Raphaelitism. Additionally, Yeats’s private symbolism and the visual aspects of his poetry bear much resemblance to Pre-Raphaelite ideas. The examples gathered in the present study show that the work of the Brotherhood did not pass away as a short-lived phenomenon, but instead paved the way for future generations of poets and painters. The Pre-Raphaelite legacy is significant, and the achievements of the movement encompass both poetry and painting, which they freed from their constraints simultaneously, bringing the two areas of artistic expression closer together.

The analytical approach taken towards the interrelationship of poetry and painting in this study has consisted of a treatment of both forms of expression as “secondary modelling systems,” composed of distinguishable *meaningful* units (referred to as “images” throughout the argument). The application of this approach to *both* arts has demonstrated that those units are indeed comparable even though they are created in different artistic domains and employ different tools, methods and material in order to express meanings. As has been shown, these arts can be analysed in a parallel fashion if they are treated as texts that can be *read* regardless of the kind of code they are composed of. Therefore, it is possible to demonstrate that the intellectual operations involved in both the poetic and the painterly text creation and reception processes are similar.

To show that it is possible to *compare* these arts has been the broadest aim of this study. Such a comparison leads to the discovery of specific *similarities* between the two artistic domains. In this study, a few fields of intellectual operations have

¹ Richard L. Stein, *The Ritual of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 203-4.

been treated as those that particularly facilitate investigation of the resemblances between poetry and painting. First of all, notions of spatiality and temporality have been the most informative and constructive in terms of cross-artistic references. As has been proved, neither space nor time can be unequivocally associated with only one form of expression; even though the refutation of Lessing's traditional approach is not an innovative contribution of the present study to the research field, my argument provides evidence that spatiality and temporality are not realms differentiating poetry from painting but are, in fact, spheres that facilitate the substantiation of the close connection between the arts. The evidence was gathered throughout the demonstration of the interconnectedness, but also ambivalence, of time and space as concepts as well as due to the revelation of the presence of temporal structures in painting and spatial relations in poetry, which was a traditionally repudiated argument.

The next broad notion that this study has been concerned with is spectatorship. The concept has appeared with the same frequency in interpretations of poetry and in analyses of painting; this fact can serve as an argument supporting the proximity of these arts. More specifically, the idea of looking, when it appears in discussions of poetry, immediately steers these discussions towards the topic of human visual perception, which conventionally relates to pictorial arts. At this point, what I believe to be two significant achievements of the current study should be mentioned: first, not only are the themes of human perception, visibility and even physical optics discussed in relation to painterly creation, but, and this is worth emphasising, they are also explored in connection with poetic accounts. Secondly, the argument successfully, I believe, merges the concepts of the "reader" and the "viewer" into one locution – the "reader/viewer" – in discussions of these two, thereby conceptually fused arts. The most prominent (but not the only) illustration of this achievement is the phenomenon of the *double work of art*, which was discussed as being, in varying degrees, a unified form of painterly/poetic expression. Of course, it would be an overstatement to claim that such an approach to the recipient of the artistic experience is an innovative contribution of the present study, but contemporary criticism is still too bashful in using the "reader/viewer" as a legitimate, conceptual entity in discussions of painting/poetry as fused forms of expression.

Inter-systemic correspondence was most evidently exemplified in the parts of this dissertation concerned with the verbal features of painterly expression and the visual qualities of poetry. As was pointed out, paintings do indeed show “exclusively” poetic attributes, like the ability to generate narratives, equivalents of rhetorical figures, devices that indicate mood, and self-reflexive remarks. Poetry, on the other hand, has painterly characteristics such as indications of space, attention to detail and references to the act of looking itself. These sets of attributes do not only reveal that painting and poetry share each other’s features, but also that each of those forms of art can *imitate* the other. The intermedial “exchange” of properties leads to a situation in which verbal images can actually “simulate” pictorial occurrences, and, reversibly, visual images “pretend” to belong to the realm of verbalism. The presentation of such examples in this study is, I believe, a further noteworthy accomplishment.

As was stated at the outset of this study, similarities inevitably entail differences. These are most vividly observable in transformations of poetry and painting into the other medium, in which cases the mode of inter-systemic translation is exposed. The most frequent alterations involve the emphases and contexts that are changed during the process of conversion. For example, the painter or the poet may choose to focus on a different area than the one highlighted in the source work, or the converted work can be situated in altered historical or cultural circumstances. Frequently, the time perspectives are also changed; poetic extensions of momentary actions from painting obviously indicate a discrepancy between the verbal and visual renderings. This fact, however, does not mean that prolonged time perspectives are not achievable in painting: this study examines examples of visual narratives, or so-called “pregnant moments” with extended chronology. Thus, the difference in question is one between particular versions of the same motif or a deliberate modification of the source meanings by the “appropriator,” not a difference dictated by the insufficiency of any of these forms of art.

Another dissimilarity, and, this time, a certain deficiency of the visual medium, surfaces in the painters’ attempts to render ambiguity, moral dilemmas or complex spiritual experiences. Such transformations often involve a narrowing of meaning, and the resulting painterly representations prove limited, simplified or too obvious (as in the case of Hunt’s depictions of Shakespeare’s characters). Nevertheless, instances of successful renderings of even the most intricate spiritual

states are also numerous, as is proved by the example of Rossetti's Dantesque paintings. Therefore, it is not legitimate to claim that painting is incapable of conveying abstract complexities.

It has not been the aim of this study to desperately search for differences, and, as it turns out, when dissimilarities between poetry and painting occur, they are not essentially conditioned by the nature of these art forms. One could even say that there are no discrepancies between the arts that could not be reconciled on the condition that both arts are approached with the same attitude towards their creation, structure and mechanisms. The stance assumed in the present study is, in fact, exactly of this kind, with its emphasis on the image-istic, textual and readerly² character of both forms of expression.

² a deliberate reference to Barthes' "readerly text," combining the essence of Barthes' concept and the "readability" of painting

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APPENDIX

Figure 1. William Holman Hunt *Our English Coasts*, 1852



Figure 4. J. E. Millais *A Waterfall in Glenfinlas*



Figure 2. J. E. Millais *Esther*



Figure 5. Ford Madox Brown *An English Autumn Afternoon*



Figure 6. William Holman Hunt *A Street Scene in Cairo: The Lantern Maker's Courtship*



Figure 3. J. E. Millais *Stella*



Figure 7. J. E. Millais *The Rescue*



Figure 8. J. E. Millais *The Escape of a Heretic*



Figure 9. D.G. Rossetti *Reverie*



Figure 10. Ford Madox Brown *Work*



Figure 11. Ford Madox Brown *Cromwell on His Farm*



Figure 12. J. E. Millais's *Pizarro Seizing the Inca of Peru*



Figure 13. J. E. Millais *A Huguenot, on St. Bartholomew's Day Refusing to Shield Himself from Danger by Wearing A Roman Catholic Badge*



Figure 15. J. E. Millais *The Return of the Dove to the Arc*

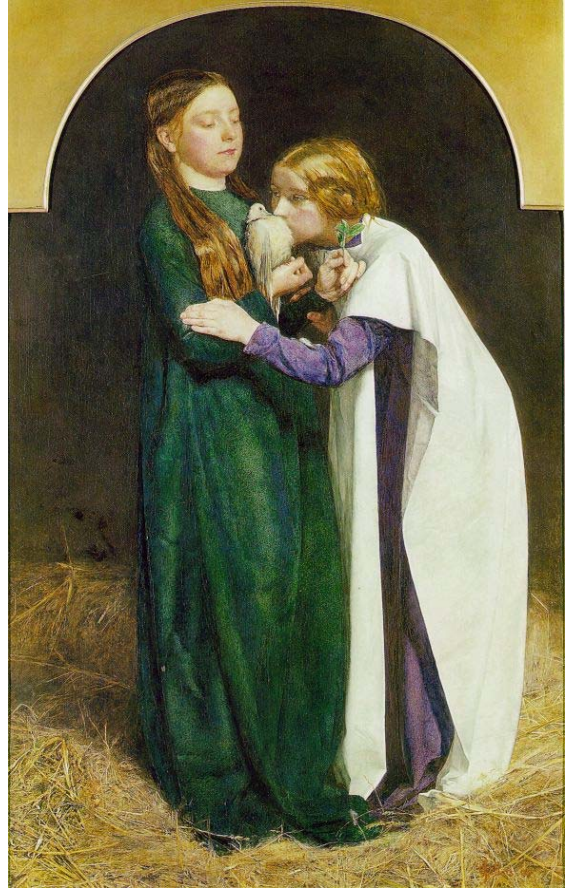


Figure 14. Ford Madox Brown *Waiting: An English Fireside of 1854-5,*



Figure 16. J. E. Millais *My First Sermon*



Figure 17. D.G. Rossetti *Morning Music*



Figure 18. Henry Wallis *The Stonebreaker*



Figure 19. Charles Allston Collins *Convent Thoughts*



Figure 20. J. R. S. Stanhope *Thoughts of the Past*



Figure 21. William Holman Hunt *Il Dolce Far Niente*



Figure 22. J. E. Millais *The Black Brunswicker*



Figure 23. Ford Madox Brown *Chaucer at the Court of Edward III*



Figure 24. Ford Madox Brown *The Pretty Baa-Lambs*



Figure 25. D.G. Rossetti *Carlisle Wall*



Figure 26. J. E. Millais's *Spring (Apple Blossoms)*



Figure 27. William Holman Hunt *The Shadow of Death*



Figure 28. D.G. Rossetti *Before the Battle*



Figure 29. J. E. Millais *No*



Figure 30. J. E. Millais *Yes*



Figure 31. J. E. Millais *Trust Me*



Figure 32. Ford Madox Brown *Take Your Son, Sir*



Figure 34. D.G. Rossetti *Lucrezia Borgia*



Figure 35. Ford Madox Brown *The Hayfield*

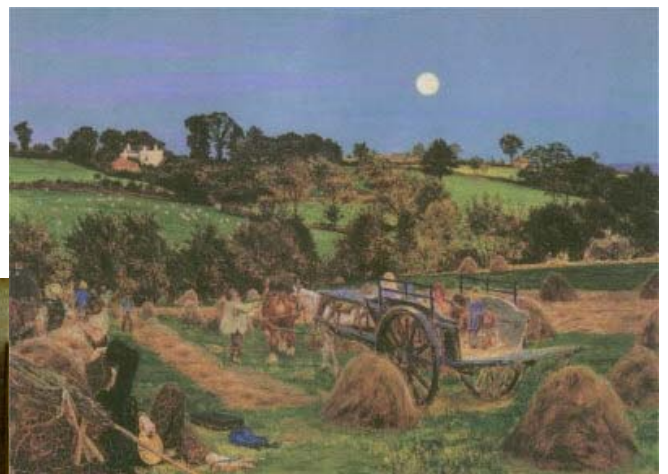


Figure 33. Diego Velazques *Las Meninas*



Figure 36. D.G. Rossetti *Bottles*

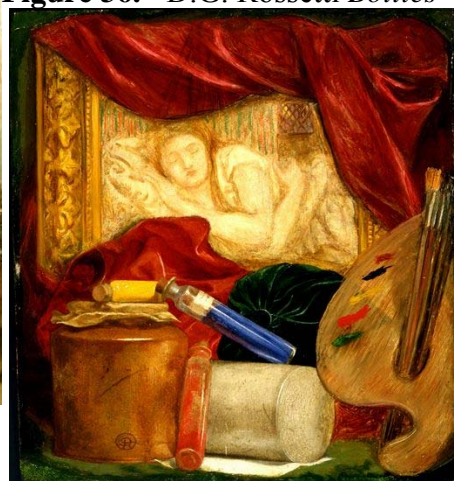


Figure 37. Ford Madox Brown *The Last of England*



Figure 38. D.G. Rossetti *The Bower Meadow*



Figure 39. D.G. Rossetti *A Girl at a Lattice*



Figure 40. John Brett *Val d'Aosta*

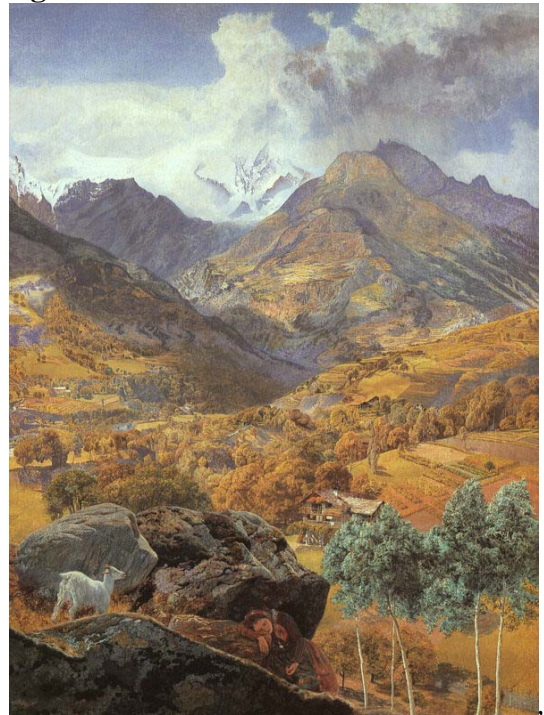


Figure 41. Ford Madox Brown *Walton-on-the-Naze*



Figure 42. John Brett *Stonebreaker*



Figure 43. John W. Inchbold *A Study in March*



Figure 44. D.G. Rossetti *Annunciation*



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Figure 45. J. E. Millais's *Yes or No*



Figure 46. J. E. Millais *The Bridesmaid*



Figure 49. J. E. Millais *The Blind Girl*



Figure 47. William Holman Hunt *May Morning on Magdalen Tower*



Figure 50. E. Burne-Jones *The Mill*



Figure 48. Edward Burne-Jones *Green Summer*



Figure 51. D. G. Rossetti *Risen at Dawn*



Figure 52. J. E. Millais *Autumn Leaves*



Figure 54. John Brett *The Hedger*



Figure 55. J. E. Millais *Leisure Hours*



Figure 53. J. E. Millais *Waiting*



Figure 56. J. E. Millais *The Vale of Rest*



Figure 57. J. E. Millais *My Second Sermon*



Figure 59. Władysław Hasiór *Wyszywanie charakteru*



Figure 60. Ford Madox Brown *Stages of Cruelty*

Figure 58. Salvadore Dali *Persistence of Memory*

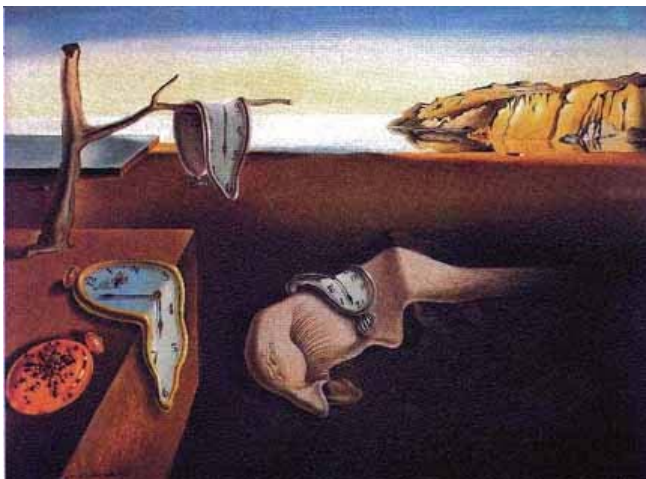


Figure 61. William Holman Hunt *Afterglow in Egypt*



Figure 62. J. E. Millais's *Lorenzo and Isabella*.



Figure 65. D. G. Rossetti *Blue Bower*



Figure 63. William Holman Hunt *Children's Holiday*



Figure 66. J. E. Millais *The Order of Release*



Figure 64. D. G. Rossetti *The Blue Closet*



Figure 67. D. G. Rossetti *Ecce Ancilla Domini!*

